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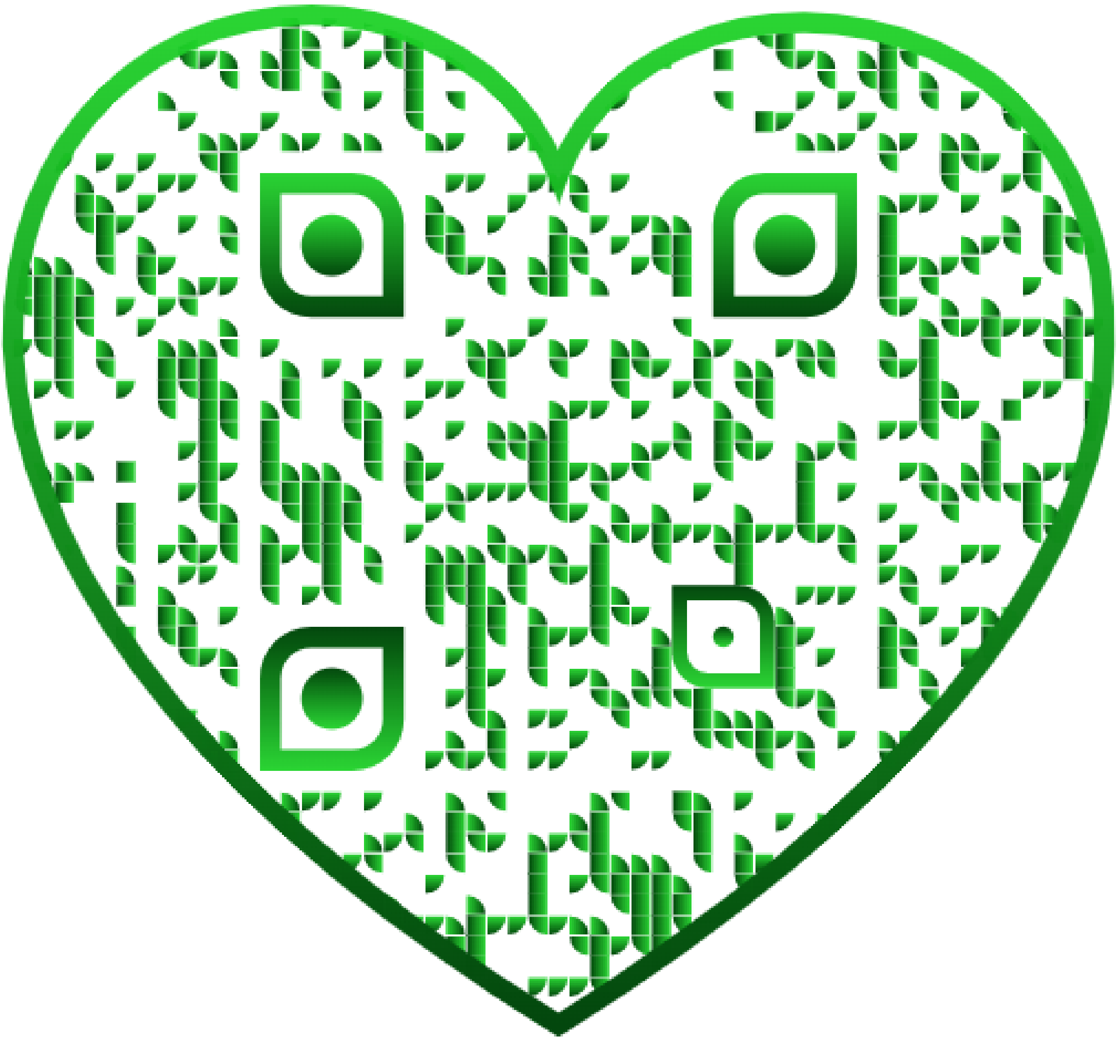

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COMMENT

V8s ARE BACK AS LAMBO AND ROLLS COOL ON EVs

Having spent time with the CEOs of Rolls-Royce and Lamborghini recently, it's been striking to hear both talk about powertrain strategy and the move to EVs.

Rolls-Royce has an EV, the Spectre, which was its most popular model in Europe last year, and it was originally planning to go all-electric by 2030. But that no longer seems to be on the cards and CEO Chris Brownridge is tight-lipped about when the next EV will come, simply saying that the firm responds to its customers' needs.

Lamborghini, meanwhile, has switched to predominantly plug-in hybrids but it's looking increasingly likely that its first EV will be delayed (p8). The electric Lanzador was earmarked to arrive by 2030, but the firm is now considering launching the model as a PHEV instead. The Italian brand is also working on bio-fuels to use in a standard petrol tank.

Rolls and Lambo are very different high-end car makers but both are independent firms backed by huge players (BMW and the VW Group), which gives them access to a breadth of technology, plus flexibility to pick and choose what suits them.

So it's telling that even these ultra-luxury makers are faltering on the next step. They build cars to order and the suggestion is that most customers are demanding eight cylinders or more. It's looking like there's plenty more life in ICE cars yet.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Zenos is back

Mid-engined roadster returns with a 380bhp Volvo engine, a sub-800kg weight and a £140k price tag. Matt Prior gets to grips with it.

Supercars they never built

Some planned supercars sadly never become reality. From Ford GT70 to Vauxhall SRV, these are the ones we never got.

Ferrari's EV: tech insights

You've read the dizzying stats. Now get nerdy with the amazing innards of Ferrari's first electric car, the 1000bhp Elettrica.

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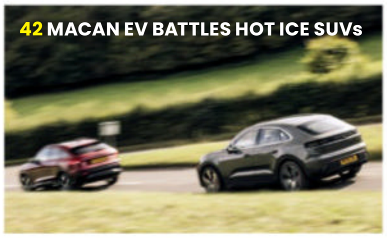

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NEWS

GOT A STORY Email our news editor
will.rimell@haymarket.com

DACIA GUNS FOR OCTAVIA WITH UPSIZED ESTATE

Rugged, Bigster-based wagon will arrive next year priced at less than £25,000

AUTOCAR
IMAGE
ND72 VYH

Dacia will go after the Skoda Octavia next year with a new rugged estate model that's petrol-powered, off-road ready and priced at less than £25,000.

Due for launch in the coming months, the new model will play a crucial part in Dacia's expansion into Europe's most popular car market, the C-segment – which already accounts for a fifth of the firm's sales, following the introduction of the Bigster SUV this year. A third C-segment model will arrive around a year later.

Dacia's new CEO, Katrin Adt, told Autocar that the success of the Bigster has inspired confidence within the company that the brand can continue to expand within the highly competitive C-segment.

"Our main territory currently is the B-segment, but we have also offerings in the A-segment and we have started in the C-segment and we did that quite amazingly well with the Bigster," she said, noting that the Qashqai rival was in the top 10 best-selling retail cars for several key markets – including France and Germany – in July.

In order for this expansion to be successful, though, Adt said: "You need to watch out that every car has its own place in the segment – its own purpose – and you can be pretty sure that this will be a totally different offer to the customer than the Bigster."

Indeed, a leaked photo of what appears to be a late-stage prototype for the new model – codenamed C-Neo – shows that it will look effectively like a stretched and lifted Sandero, taking the form of a high-riding compact estate car that is expected to be around 4.6m long.

Product performance boss Patrice Lévy-Bencheton said: "There is also a significant share of the C-segment which is 'non-SUV' people, who are still looking for a lower driving position, a more efficient product [which is] less 'ostentatious'. For some, an SUV is a bit ostentatious."

He added that there is a significant proportion of buyers in this space who want "the performance, the comfort and the pleasure of having a slightly bigger car but who are not attracted by the SUV shape and who think: 'We have to go for a more efficient product, more elegant.'"

Dacia sales and marketing boss Frank Marotte agreed and said the impending retirement of the Ford Focus and increasing prices of its contemporaries – such as the Volkswagen Golf, Vauxhall Astra and Toyota Corolla – have opened up an opportunity for Dacia in this segment, where it plans to undercut all major competitors, just as it did with the Bigster.

"What we want to do in the C-segment is what

New estate will effectively be stretched and lifted Sandero

> **"You can be pretty sure that this will be a totally different offer to the customer than the Bigster"**

we've done in the B- or the B- plus," said Marotte. "We have identified that with the C-SUV particularly. But even the C-hatch is probably a segment where the prices have gone up the most in the last five years. You see the increase in monthly instalment or in prices in that segment. It's massive."

He acknowledged that "the C-hatch [segment] is a challenge for us; indeed, we have no customer base" but said the success of the Bigster – around 50,000 orders in its first six months – gives the brand confidence that its expansion into larger models is viable.

Dacia will pursue a similar pricing policy with the new estate, leaving out what the company perceives to be 'non-essential' equipment in order to maintain a lower list price than its core rivals. The Bigster, for example, starts from around £25,000 – £5000 cheaper than the same-sized Nissan Qashqai and £9000 less than the Ford Kuga.

Bigster has been a sales success; estate will use its tech

The C-Neo, then, is likely to come in around the £20k mark, commanding a premium over the smaller, £15k Sandero but still being significantly cheaper than the £27k Seat Leon and £29k Octavia estates.

Being based on the same Renault Group CMF-B that Dacia uses for all its models except the Spring EV, it is expected to be all but technically identical to the Bigster, with a choice of mild- and full-hybrid petrol powertrains ranging in output from 128bhp to 153bhp, though it remains to be seen if it will follow its SUV siblings – and its Skoda rival – in being offered with four-wheel drive.

Either way, the new model will stay true to Dacia's 'rugged', activity-focused ethos by virtue of its raised suspension and body cladding – a similar treatment to that on the range-topping Sandero Stepway, which design boss David Durand said "is a bit 'outdoors' too", despite being front-driven.

He said: "In this case, it's just ground clearance and high tyres that make you confident to go on a rocky road with no fear – and you use it every day, and you [fill] it with anything you want.

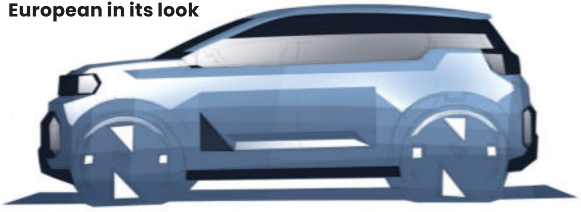
"It's a tool. It's not an object that you show off in front of your house and that represents your social level. It's something that you are really using every day, with the kids, with adults. You have big roominess. So it's this slightly different 'outdoors' way that we can explore."

Durand would not be drawn on a potential reveal date, nor commit to any firm details of the new car, but said it "makes a lot of sense" for Dacia to enter this segment, as other brands "are just abandoning this field, because everybody's making SUVs".

FELIX PAGE

NEW DACIA SPRING TO MOVE GAME ON

New Twingo-based city car will be more overtly European in its look



The next-generation Dacia Spring Electric will benefit from being an all-new model, with the firm's sales boss admitting a need to "enhance" its performance while still maintaining a "very accessible price".

The new city car will be based on the electric Renault Twingo and, like that model, be designed and built in Europe. That's in contrast to the current Spring, which is built in China and was originally designed for emerging global markets and as a result has been criticised for its performance and dynamics.

"We need to enhance the product performance, especially the drivability. That needs to be a little bit improved," said Frank Marotte of the company's smallest car. Being related to the Twingo, the next-generation version is likely to share that car's powertrains and chassis set-up – which itself will be derived from the larger Renault 5, which uses the same AMPR Small platform.

"Also, we are in Europe with design standards which are slightly different from some other regions in the world, so in terms of proportions and style, we need to improve," said Marotte.

Today's Spring is £15k; new EV will be similar

LUCID TAKES ON TESLA WITH UK-BOUND MODEL Y RIVAL

Earth SUV to join Air and Gravity as US firm targets global sales push

Lucid is working on a third model, named the Earth, that will spearhead a wider global push for the US-based car maker, including a UK launch by the end of 2027.

The SUV will be the first model underpinned by a new modular platform that will be used to expand Lucid's range beyond today's Air saloon and Gravity SUV, launched in 2021 and 2023 respectively. Sales of both are limited to the US, Canada, the Middle East and a small number of European markets.

The Earth, a Tesla Model Y rival, is slated to arrive in 2027, initially in the US, followed by a wider range of left-hand-drive markets than Lucid currently occupies. Before the start of 2028, the firm will begin shipping right-hand-drive examples – including to the UK – for the first time.

The start-up is regarded as one of the next big hitters in the EV market, especially for its vehicles' efficiency. The Air, for example, was the first EV to break 5.0mpkWh, thanks to technically advanced powertrains that Lucid builds in-house.

The Earth is described as separate from the rest of the line-up because its mid-size platform and electric drivetrain will form the basis of at least two other new Lucid models: a Tesla Model 3 saloon rival, due in 2028, and an expected crossover to be used by Uber as a driverless taxi.

The new SUV will be launched with single-motor rear-wheel-drive and dual-motor four-wheel-drive set-ups. Technical specs are still under wraps and Lucid is currently carrying out the assembly of a fleet of validation prototypes.

Speaking to Autocar,

AUTOCAR
IMAGE
LUCID

STI BADGE TO RETURN ON ICE AND ELECTRIC SUBARUS

The WRX STI was taken off sale in the UK in 2018

SUBARU WILL REVIVE its dormant STI performance brand with two new concept cars – one an electric vehicle and the other powered by an internal combustion engine.

A preview image published by Subaru ahead of the upcoming Tokyo motor show reveals that the pair will be hot hatchbacks featuring chunky bodykits and swathes of aero.

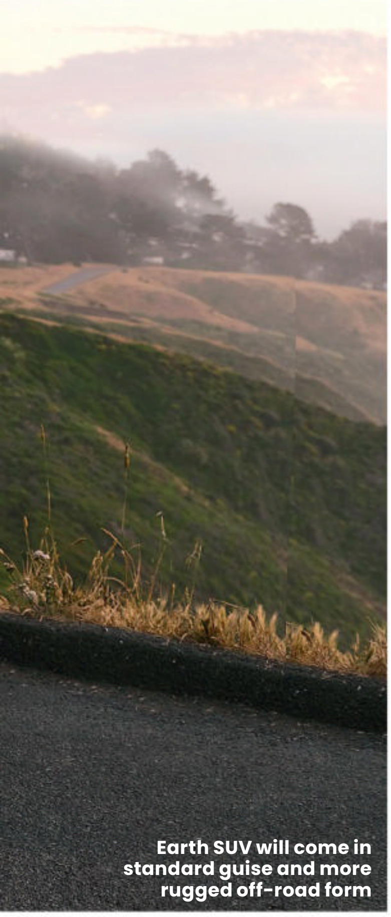
The EV in particular will introduce a new design language, which Subaru describes as the "spearhead" for its next-generation line-up.

Technical details of the EV have yet to be revealed, but the combustion-engined concept – which looks more closely tied to the existing Subaru line-up – will use the firm's signature boxer engine configuration from the Japan/EU-sold Impreza, along with its symmetrical four-wheel drive system.

The two concepts are the strongest hint at a relaunch of the STI brand after the final WRX STI came off sale globally in 2021. The model was pulled from the UK three years before that.

Executives have more recently warmed to the idea of the STI badge returning, with UK managing director Lorraine Bishton telling Autocar last year it was "a bit of a missed opportunity" for the brand to ignore its sporting heritage.

Lucid Air saloon and Gravity SUV are on sale in LHD markets



Earth SUV will come in standard guise and more rugged off-road form

Lucid's head of chassis and vehicle dynamics, David Lickfold, said the US car maker had achieved "significant" reductions in both component count and production costs with its new mid-sized model line. He claimed the Earth represents a big departure from the Air and Gravity in engineering terms, owing to its greater modularity and standardisation.

"The component count compared with the Air and Gravity has been significantly reduced," he said. "We have greater modularity and fewer individual components than the Model Y."

Lucid's focus on component and production efficiency is aimed at creating a competitive range from smaller, less expensive battery packs, together with more advanced electric motors, including the company's new 335bhp Atlas unit.

Lickfold revealed road-going testing is set to be ramped up rapidly by the end of 2025. The development schedule includes an accelerated winter testing programme that will validate prototypes in Minnesota first and then fly them to New Zealand for additional assessment – an approach that allows for two full winter testing cycles within a six-month period.

Substantial engineering work has already been completed, with around 85% of chassis and brake tuning finalised through computer simulation as part of a two-year development programme, added Lickfold.

Together with standard versions of the new electric SUV, Lucid is also planning a more ruggedly styled off-road variant of the Earth, inspired by the earlier Gravity X concept.

Production is planned at Lucid's factory in Arizona and its forthcoming plant in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. The Saudi site will initially assemble Air and Gravity models in complete knock-down form. Manufacture of the Earth and its saloon sibling will begin later.

GREG KABLE

STI concepts preview sporty new ICE and electric hot hatches

BENTLEY MARKS MILESTONES WITH MULLINER SPECIALS

BENTLEY HAS REVEALED a trio of special models to mark three significant anniversaries for the storied Crewe-based car manufacturer.

In 2025, the T Series celebrates 60 years since its launch, the Turbo R marks 40 years and the Flying Spur will have been in production for 20 years.

Created by Bentley's Mulliner bespoke division, the modern one-offs feature the same colour, trim and "ethos" as the models to which they are paying tribute.

1965 T SERIES

The first monocoque Bentley featured a 199bhp 6.2-litre V8. Today, it's honoured with a special Flying Spur Azure, showcasing the same alloy design, Shell Grey exterior and interior leather trim.

1985 TURBO R

The Turbo R, reaching 62mph in 7.0sec, was considered the return of the Blower. Today's special Flying Spur Speed is somewhat faster but shares the Turbo R's Brooklands Green paint, Monaco Yellow interior trim and part-linen interior.

2005 FLYING SPUR

As the first four-door Bentley of the Volkswagen Group era, the W12 Continental Flying Spur could transport four at 200mph. Mulliner has specified the similarly fast Flying Spur Speed with matching Cypress paint, 10-spoke alloy wheels and a green leather interior.

LANZADOR LIKELY TO DITCH ELECTRIC POWER FOR PHEV

The raised four-seat GT was originally billed as Lamborghini's first EV

AUTOCAR
IMAGE

JAECOO 8 TO SQUARE UP TO KODIAQ IN UK NEXT YEAR

OFFICIAL PICTURES

Jaecoo 8 will be the brand's new range-topping family SUV

THE JAECOO 8 family SUV will arrive in the UK next year as a rival for the Volkswagen Tayron and Skoda Kodiaq.

A spokesperson confirmed the launch of the new model after a few UK dealers published advertisements for it online. The 8 will sit above the existing 5 and 7 SUVs in the Chinese brand's line-up.

UK specifications have yet to be confirmed, but in Australia (another right-hand-drive market) the 8 gets a turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder petrol engine that puts out 245bhp and 284lb ft of torque. It can be specced with either front- or four-wheel drive and both variants use an eight-speed automatic. Range-topping cars also get adaptive suspension.

Inside, there is a 12.3in digital instrument display and a matching infotainment touchscreen.

In various global markets, the 8 is offered with five-,

Minimalist-look cabin has a 12.3in main touchscreen

SEAT/CUPRA CEO CONFIRMED

The Volkswagen Group has appointed Markus Haupt as CEO of Seat/Cupra, following his five months as interim CEO. Haupt, previously head of production and logistics, has replaced Wayne Griffiths.

UK BACKS NEW MINI TOYOTA

Toyota's FT-Me Concept could make production thanks to a £15 million UK government grant. If it's found to be viable, it could be built in Burnaston. Quadricycle regulations will limit it to 8bhp.

Lanzador will now probably use a V8 and electric motors

Lamborghini will decide imminently whether the Lanzador, revealed in concept form in 2023 and touted as its first EV, will be electric or instead fitted with a plug-in hybrid set-up akin to that used by much of the firm's existing line-up.

The electric Lanzador was due to arrive before the end of the decade, but that has been thrown into question by a slowdown in EV uptake particularly at this level of the market, along with delays in EV development at the Volkswagen Group parent company and in-house sibling Porsche.

Talking to Autocar, Lamborghini CEO Stephan Winkelmann said: "With Lanzador, we need to decide whether [it will be] a PHEV or electric in the next few weeks."

While he stopped short of confirming the Italian firm's decision, he also said: "When it comes to our cars, [customers] don't see BEVs as an alternative today. We could do a BEV but I think it is a bad offer for the next few years."

An electric Lanzador was due to have up to 1350bhp and 980V charging hardware. A plug-in hybrid version of the concept would use a similar set-up to the twin-turbo V8 and electric motors found on the Urus and Temerario.

YOU CAN'T HIDE WHO YOU ARE
TEMERARIO
TEMERARIO

CEO Winkelmann: EV is "a bad offer for the next few years"

Further proof that Lamborghini is putting the brakes on its electric plans came a few months ago, when Winkelmann confirmed that the next-generation Urus, due in 2029, would not go electric as originally expected but stay as a plug-in hybrid.

The likely decision on the Lanzador is even more poignant as main rival Ferrari has just revealed more details of its first EV, codenamed Elettrica, which will arrive next year. If Lamborghini delays its battery-powered Lanzador, it will be at least five years behind Ferrari. Winkelmann wouldn't comment on the Elettrica but said: "We look very carefully at what Ferrari is doing."

Winkelmann said his company's biggest challenge is achieving emissions standards globally, particularly given how legislation varies so widely in different regions.

"We will meet Euro 7 [emissions targets], which is a huge step. But in US we have different rules, for example," he said. "We have to start flexible and alert in this sense. It is more favourable to continue to do PHEV cars."

He also confirmed that the V12, used in the Revuelto, will continue after 2030.

Talking more broadly about the future, he added: "The industry needs a clear direction and it should not just be about one new type of technology."

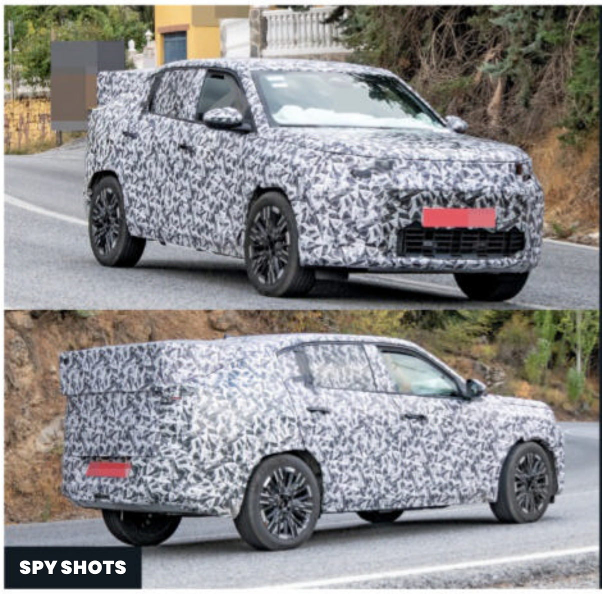
To that end, Winkelmann has recently restructured Lamborghini's board and has put strategy director Stefano Rutigliano in charge of a new alternative fuels project.

Winkelmann explained that it is looking at "fuel technology you will be able to put in your tank, using a percentage of bio-fuel".
RACHEL BURGESS

six- and seven-seat configurations.

Prices have yet to be announced, but the 8 is likely to be notably more expensive than the 7, which starts from £30,115. Crucially, it is expected to undercut the likes of the Kodiaq, which is priced from £39,905.

Jaecoo 8 is expected to be priced below £40k



SPY SHOTS

NEW FIAT FASTBACK TO EXPAND PANDA LINE-UP

Fiat will expand the Panda line-up with a production version of its 2024 Fastback concept. Spotted testing for the first time by Autocar's spy photographers, it will be the Italian firm's largest model to date.

It will use the same Smart Car underpinnings as the smaller Grande Panda and is therefore likely to be sold with petrol, hybrid and electric power.

Fiat has billed it as a successor to both the Europe-market Tipo hatchback and estate and the South American-market SUV-coupé of the same name.

Autocar understands it will be called Panda Fastback. An SUV variant, based on the concept revealed at the same time, is also believed to be in development, although it has yet to break cover.

The production Fastback is due to be launched next year, given that Fiat has previously pledged to launch a new car every year until 2027.

FORD HOMES IN ON EUROPE

Ford has named Jim Baumbick as its first dedicated Europe boss in three years. The American takes on the role as part of a wide-reaching strategy to optimise its business in the region. Baumbick joined Ford in 1993.

SLICK NEW LOOK FOR ARIYA

The Nissan Ariya has received a minimalist new look in its first major update since it was launched in 2022. The smoother styling aligns the Ariya more closely with the incoming Mk3 Leaf.

HOW RIMAC TECHNOLOGY PLANS TO TRANSFORM EVs

Solid-state batteries and light, potent powertrains bring new possibilities

Rimac Technology, the Croatian car maker's stand-alone engineering division, will "build Rimac out from its position as a start-up" by revolutionising the EV world with solid-state batteries, more power-dense packs, high-performance powertrains and more, its chief operating officer, Nurdin Pitarevic, has told Autocar.

A company that was spawned from its Rimac namesake in 2022 following the deal with the Volkswagen Group to create Bugatti Rimac, Rimac Technology has been developing EV tech for the Croatian hypercar maker and third-party manufacturers.

This has ranged from small hybrid battery systems to full rolling chassis for clients that include everyone from large global manufacturers to low-volume firms. It also develops electronic systems, electric drive units and user-interface components.

SOLID STATE IS ON THE WAY

In an exclusive Autocar interview, Pitarevic – Rimac Group CEO Mate Rimac's second in command – explained that the company is already well advanced with a new range of solid-state batteries. It is working on them with cell maker ProLogium and composite materials experts at Mitsubishi and it aims to put them on the market late this decade.

Rimac Technology COO Nurdin Pitarevic

Pitarevic said he expects testing of the batteries to begin very soon and his "wish would be" that they would have their first application (in what he terms mid-volume production) in a new Bugatti model, due in 2030.

He expects the cost of the new-tech batteries to reach parity with current NMC (standard cell) types by 2035, though he insists Rimac has no wish to make solid-state batteries in big enough volumes to power conventionally priced cars. Perhaps if a bigger OEM were interested in licensing their technology to make batteries for their own cars, they would "look at it", he said.

A prototype of the solid-state battery has a capacity of 100kWh and is claimed to be between 20% and 30% more energy dense than a conventional battery for the dimensions. It's also around 30kg lighter, mainly because of weight saved by the light but ultra-stiff composite housing contributed by Mitsubishi. The pack can also accept charge much more quickly and in a safer manner.

Although Rimac's reputation rises ever higher as it develops as a major supplier of premium high-tech components, the company is unlikely to make cars beyond the slow-selling Nevera, according to Pitarevic.

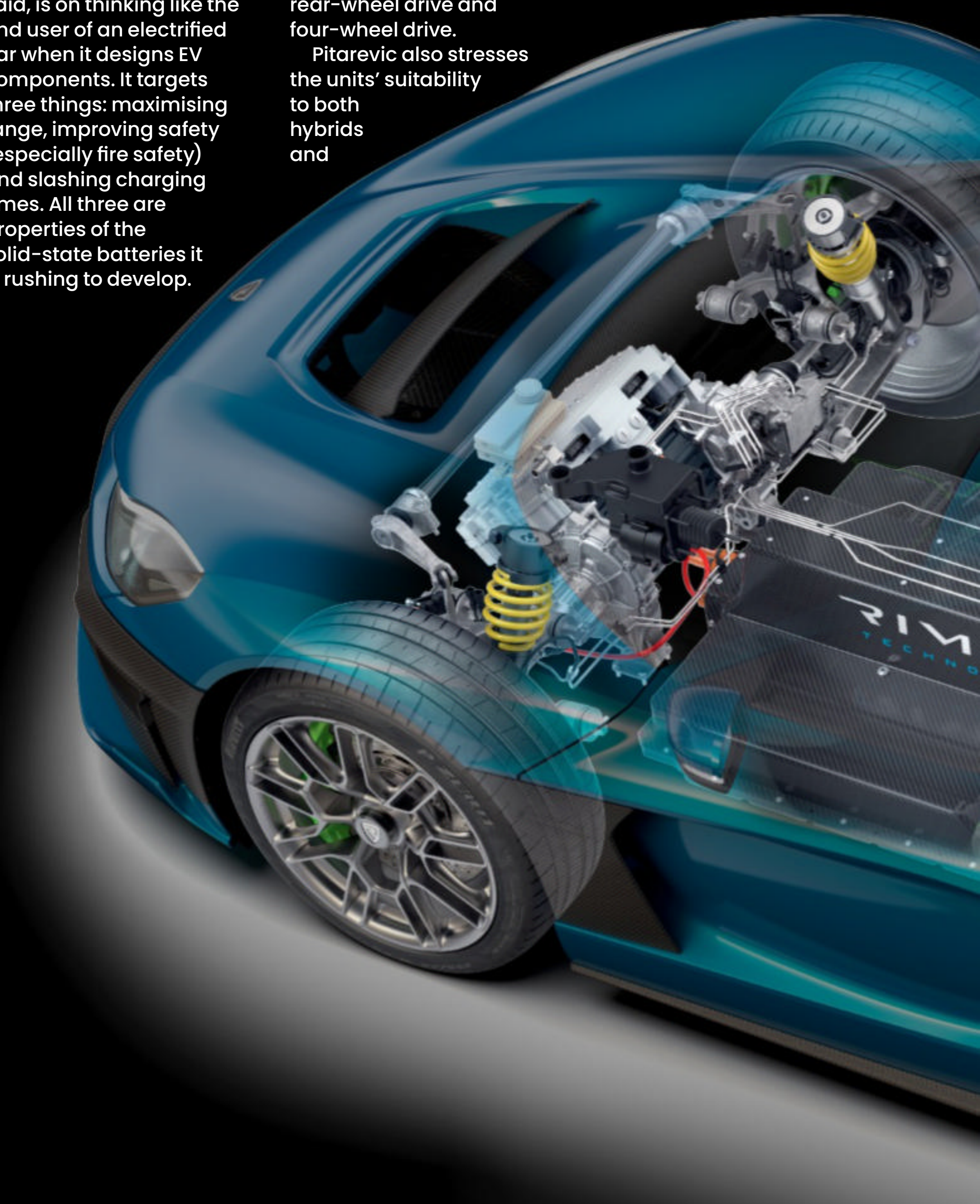
Rimac's focus today, he said, is on thinking like the end user of an electrified car when it designs EV components. It targets three things: maximising range, improving safety (especially fire safety) and slashing charging times. All three are properties of the solid-state batteries it is rushing to develop.

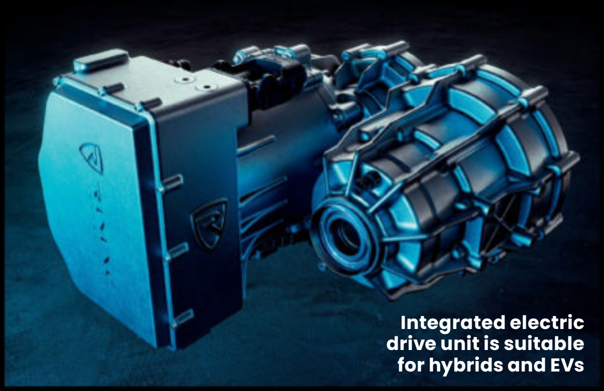
E-AXLES FOR EVs AND HYBRIDS

The new e-axles, which combine electric drive motors, gearboxes and control electronics in a variety of light and compact packages, can put out between 200bhp and 470bhp in layouts to suit front-wheel drive, rear-wheel drive and four-wheel drive.

Pitarevic also stresses the units' suitability to both hybrids and pure EVs, and cites BMW, Porsche and Saudi Arabian EV start-up CEER as customers so far – as well as many others that remain anonymous.

This all comes as Rimac prepares its new €300 million (£261m) manufacturing campus, comprising 95,000m^2 of




Integrated electric drive unit is suitable for hybrids and EVs

"Its 100kW solid-state battery is 20-30% more energy dense and around 30kg lighter" production space in Zagreb, Croatia, to create tens of thousands of these tech components every month.

Explaining how quickly e-axle tech is changing, Pitarevic pointed to a number of examples. One was an assembly more or less equal in power and torque to the 1288bhp Nevera's rear-drive motor. Being built for a powerful new SUV from CEER, this unit weighs just 132kg, instead of the Nevera's 198kg.

The other was a much smaller package, possibly targeted at a performance coupé or perhaps even a very potent hot hatch, with a suitcase-sized 500bhp power pack weighing just 48kg.

"UNIQUE RIMAC CULTURE"

Pitarevic was poached last year by Mate Rimac from a top job in a big-scale manufacturing group, where he was managing 10,000 people in 22 factories around the world.

Asked what drew Bosnian-born, German-educated Pitarevic, at 36, to join what is a much smaller Croatian company still in its development phase, he said: "I'd heard about the unique Rimac culture of work and progress and that was very attractive and enough to get me started. Then when I joined, I found three more things I really liked.

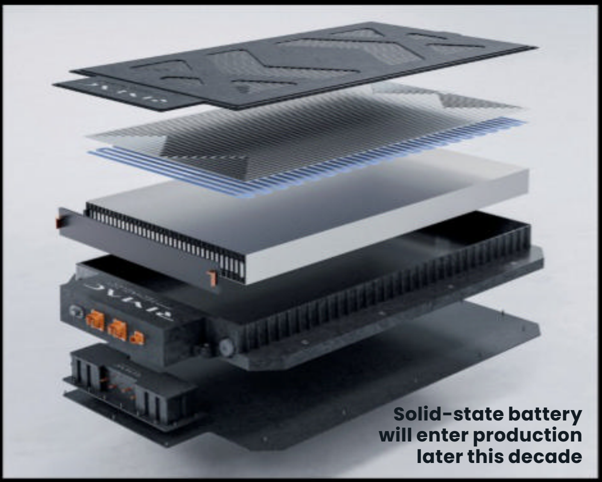
"First, no one sends emails to get decisions. They communicate much faster than that. There's a reluctance to waste time.

"Second, there's a climate that always encourages innovation. If someone has a good idea, no one – last of all Mate Rimac – is going to stop them trying it.

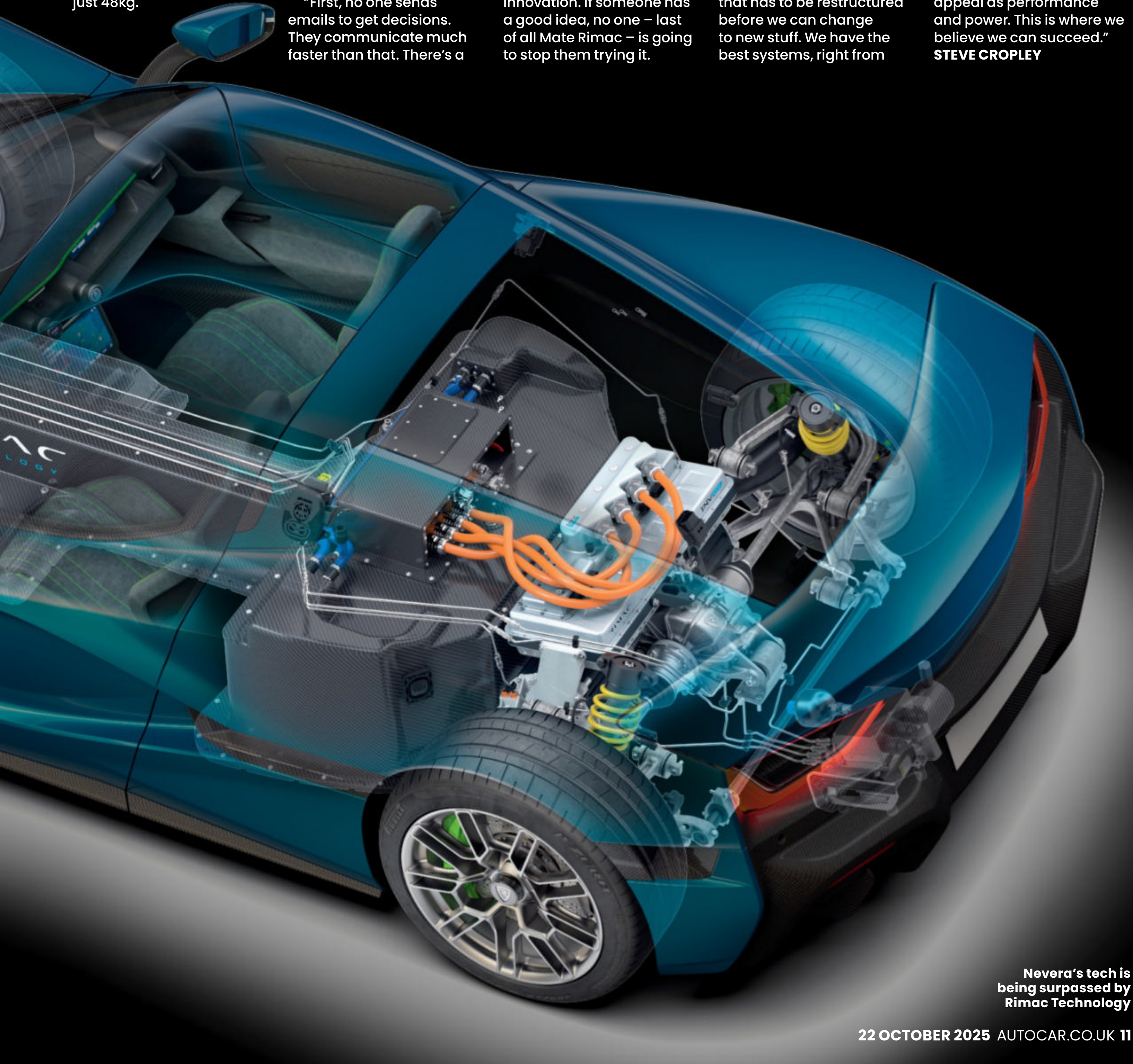
"Third and best of all, there's no existing old or conventional technology that has to be restructured before we can change to new stuff. We have the best systems, right from the start. Throw in the fact that Croatia, even though it has a very well-educated population, is still 20% to 30% lower on cost than most other European countries and you can see why we're so proud of our ability to compete with far bigger tech companies that have already been 60 or 70 years in business."

What of the future? Pitarevic said Rimac Technology will concentrate on being a supplier of highly innovative premium components, not a volume builder: "We like the premium market – the niche market, if you like – where innovation is at least as important to a car's appeal as performance and power. This is where we believe we can succeed."

STEVE CROPLEY



Solid-state battery will enter production later this decade



Nevera's tech is being surpassed by Rimac Technology

NEW CALL TO BOOST ROAD SAFETY USING FINES FUND

Police and charities want motoring fines to help pay for safety measures

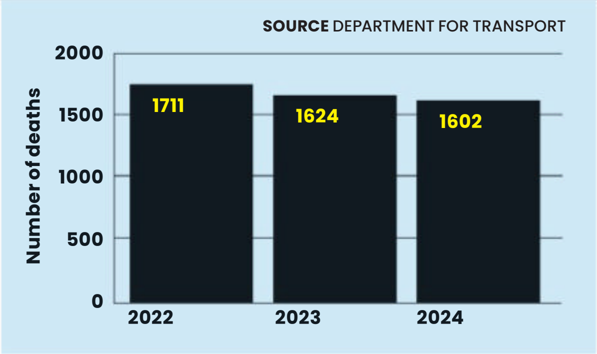
Police chiefs and charities have appealed to the government to let them spend cash raised through speed camera fines on road safety measures, rather than it going straight to Treasury coffers, as hundreds of people continue to die on UK roads every year.

In 2024, four people were killed each day, and 76 were seriously injured, as a result of highway incidents. Although fatalities dropped by 1% compared with 2023, road safety charities such as RoSPA and the RAC Foundation say that it isn't enough and that the figures indicate a lack of progress in reducing deaths and injuries.

The charities have now teamed up with a number of police forces that have called on the government to use the approximately £100 million a year generated from speed camera fines for more deterrents.

These include expanding the network of average-speed enforcement and red-light cameras, installing speed and traffic-calming measures, delivering additional road safety programmes and running public education campaigns.

NUMBER OF ROAD DEATHS IN THE UK



SOURCE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

The cash would also help to keep current enforcement viable because many run at a loss, Simon Foster, Labour's West Midlands police and crime commissioner, told Autocar.

Currently, West Midlands' schemes are running deficits of around £1.8m – something the £2m in fines generated by its speed cameras would rectify.

Council data shows that the schemes work. For example, incidents dropped by more than 30% on some of the roads where average-speed cameras were erected.

Under the current legislation, all money raised is used for general government expenditure and so it is not spent specifically on road-related projects.

Imposing new speed limit zones can be costly for councils

> "In 2024, four people were killed each day as a result of highway incidents"

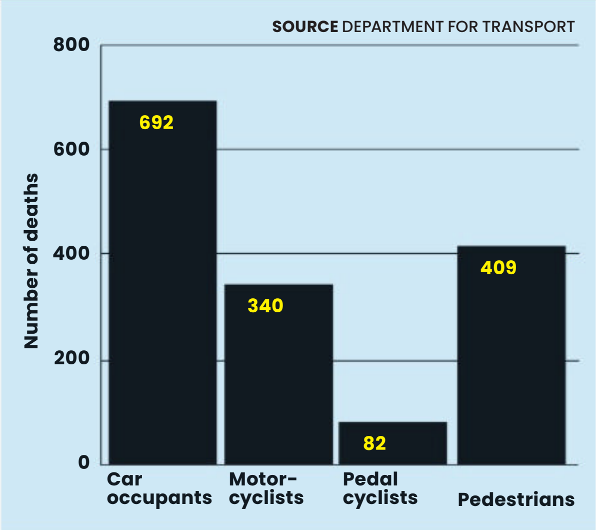
"The current system is broken and unsustainable," said Foster. "We are calling on the government to allow local areas to use road safety-related fixed-penalty fine revenue, to be reinvested into making our roads safer."

When approached by Autocar, a spokesperson for the Department for Transport said the government has "no plans to change this system".

The stark cost of improving road safety has been revealed to Autocar by Surrey County Council. Within the next year, it will spend millions of pounds on an array of initiatives.

Most notably the council will spend £5m on speed limit and speed management programmes and road safety schemes outside schools.

HOW ROAD DEATHS WERE SPLIT IN 2024



SOURCE DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT

The council has also estimated that speed limit reduction schemes, from 60mph to 50mph and from 40mph to 30mph, plus feasibility studies and improvements will cost an average of £25,000 per area. Schemes planned for roads near schools will cost even more: up to £200,000.

Nineteen 20mph schemes – many of them requested by residents and described as 'quick win' solutions by the council – will cost around £20,000 each.

Other councils implementing new road safety schemes against a national backdrop of stubbornly high casualty rates include Wiltshire Council. It reported that 169 people were killed or seriously injured on its roads last year. That number was up from 167 the year before.

Councillor Martin Smith, cabinet member for highways, Streetscene and flooding, said: "Many of our roads are narrow, rural lanes with sharp bends and poor visibility. Vision Zero [to eliminate road deaths and serious injuries to zero by 2040] will be difficult to achieve but it's good to have a target."

Wiltshire Council's annual roads budget is £45m but Smith couldn't say precisely how much is spent on road safety. "I do know it's not cheap," he said. "People see new speed signs and wonder how they can cost £10,000 but there's a technical speed assessment to pay for plus the cost of consulting residents and then the traffic regulation order that makes the new speed limit lawful. I am keen to reduce this cost and the red tape around changes to speed limits. Other councils including Oxford City and Cornwall are doing so and we should too."

Smith declined to comment on the proposal by police chiefs that fines revenue from speed cameras should be spent on road safety schemes rather than going to the Treasury. However, he said that collaboration with the region's police chiefs on road safety is improving. "They are now more interested in road safety from the perspective of local communities," he said.

JOHN EVANS

ROSPA CALLS FOR MORE 20MPH ZONES

Responding to the latest road casualty figures, The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has called for the government's upcoming National Road Safety Strategy to include the expansion of 20mph zones in residential areas and roads near schools.

The previous Conservative government pledged to crack down on what it called anti-driver road schemes, including blanket 20mph speed limits. Last year, Louise Haigh, the current government's then transport secretary, appeared to support that view when she insisted that 20mph schemes must have the support of local communities and should not be imposed by government.

In July last year, Southampton City Council changed the limit from 20mph to 30mph on a number of city centre roads, reversing changes made by the previous Labour council.

Councillor Jeremy Moulton, a former Southampton city council leader, told Autocar: "These roads should never have been reduced to 20mph in the first place. This is a small step forward for common sense."

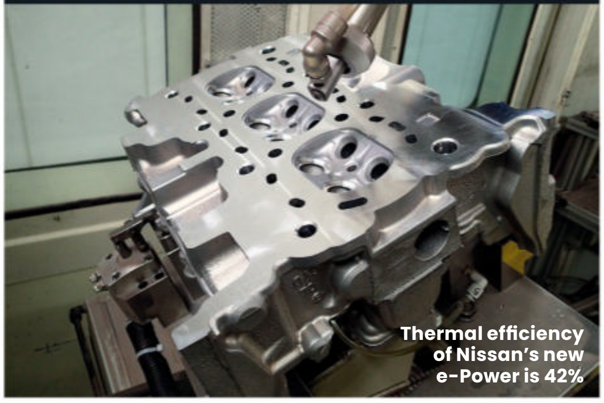
Despite these policy rollbacks, the council said it will continue to introduce 20mph limits where residents demand them.

Councillor Christie Lambert, the council's transport leader, said: "The average speed has reduced from 23.13mph to 20.7mph where the 20mph limits have come in and the council is committed to continuing its work to improve road safety across the city, working with local communities to implement measures on a location-by-location basis."

20mph zones must have local support, says the government

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE



Thermal efficiency of Nissan's new e-Power is 42%

HOW NISSAN'S E-POWER PUSHES EFFICIENCY HIGHER

COMBUSTION ENGINE development is still important and the drive for efficiency will continue for as long as engines remain in use – and the new Nissan e-Power system is a case in point. The first vehicle to use the latest, third-generation e-Power system, initially introduced in 2016, is the Qashqai, which began production in the UK in July.

Nissan's e-Power powertrain is a series hybrid system, so the 1.5-litre petrol engine works as a generator to charge the battery rather than driving the wheels. Because of that, the engine doesn't need to produce transient bursts of power and torque for acceleration. It drives an integral generator to charge the battery, but when driving at high speeds, it can also feed power via the inverter (power electronics) directly to the main drive motor while charging the battery at the same time.

An advantage of this approach is that it overcomes one of the combustion engine's main drawbacks: relatively poor thermal efficiency.

Combustion engines produce power by burning fuel, which releases expanding gases to drive pistons and produce mechanical power. But only some of the energy in the fuel is converted into mechanical energy and the rest is wasted as heat. In older engines, thermal efficiency could be as low as 20-30%, although today some are exceeding 30% and heading to 40%.

Nissan says the new e-Power engine can achieve 42% partly because the engine is designed specifically as a generator and not hampered by the need to cope with transient demands like a conventional drivetrain, and also thanks to a complex combustion strategy called STARC (Strong Tumble and Appropriately Robust ignition Channel concept). As the name suggests, it's all about creating a strong tumble effect when air rushes into the cylinders plus ignition strategies to burn the fuel-air mixture as efficiently as possible.

A new process called cold spray technology has helped achieve that by doing away with traditional valve seat inserts in the cylinder head, the rings of hardened metal pressed into the alloy cylinder head on which the valves sit as they close. Their presence leads to a compromise in the aerodynamics of the inlet tract but the new method literally sprays hardened material onto the cylinder head valve seat areas instead, allowing more flexibility in designing the shape of valve opening.

This innovation – along with an unusually large turbo to reduce pumping losses plus timing strategies to allow a high compression ratio of 13:1 – is said to balance high thermal efficiency with high power.

It's hoped future versions of e-Power will achieve 50% thermal efficiency through battery improvements, which allow 'fixed point operation' of the engine (constant rpm), enabling it to remain exactly in its most efficient operating area all the time, something that isn't quite achievable yet.

GETTY IMAGES

SELF-DRIVING TAXIS TO HIT UK ROADS NEXT YEAR

Waymo will begin autonomous I-Pace ride-hailing service in London

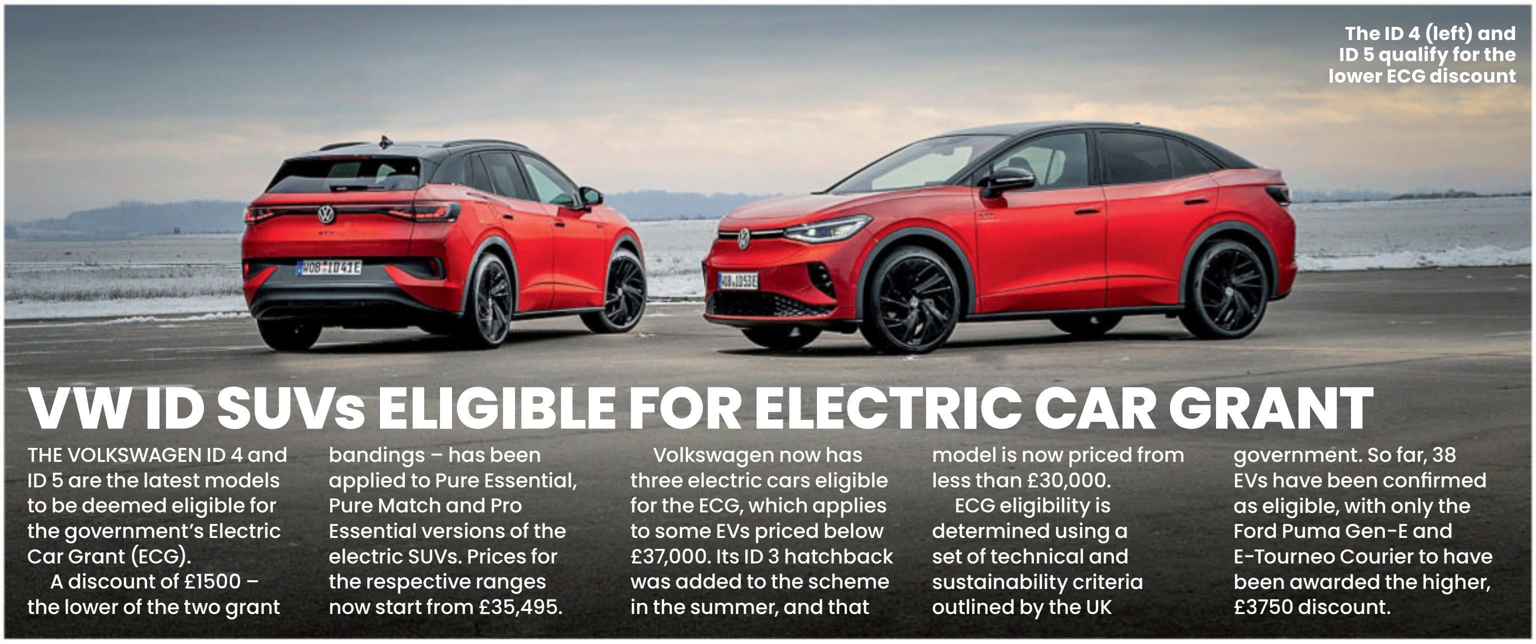
Fully self-driving taxis from US firm Waymo will take to the UK's roads next year as part of a new government-backed pilot scheme that aims to accelerate the rollout of driverless technology across the country.

The American ride-hailing service will begin its trials in London using a fleet of specially adapted Jaguar I-Pace SUVs. Waymo already runs driverless taxi services in six US states and has recently expanded into Japan, and its autonomous cars have now driven more than 100 million miles.

The news that Waymo is set to expand its operations to the UK follows confirmation in June that taxi firm Uber will also begin trials of driverless vehicles next spring. Uber will work with mapping service Wayve, and it has previously tested a fleet of Ford Mustang Mach-Es.

UK transport secretary Heidi Alexander said: "Cutting-edge investment like this will help us deliver our mission to be world leaders in new technology and spearhead national renewal that delivers

Uber has already trialled its autonomous vehicles in London



The ID 4 (left) and ID 5 qualify for the lower ECG discount

VW ID SUVs ELIGIBLE FOR ELECTRIC CAR GRANT

THE VOLKSWAGEN ID 4 and ID 5 are the latest models to be deemed eligible for the government's Electric Car Grant (ECG).

A discount of £1500 – the lower of the two grant bandings – has been applied to Pure Essential, Pure Match and Pro Essential versions of the electric SUVs. Prices for the respective ranges now start from £35,495.

Volkswagen now has three electric cars eligible for the ECG, which applies to some EVs priced below £37,000. Its ID 3 hatchback was added to the scheme in the summer, and that model is now priced from less than £30,000.

ECG eligibility is determined using a set of technical and sustainability criteria outlined by the UK government. So far, 38 EVs have been confirmed as eligible, with only the Ford Puma Gen-E and E-Tourneo Courier to have been awarded the higher, £3750 discount.

Waymo will use specially adapted self-driving I-Paces

THE UK'S NO-PILOT PILOT SCHEMES

Current legislation states that personal driverless cars won't be legal on UK roads until at least the second half of 2027. That date could change, given that ministers earlier this year pushed back the target of 2026.

Why, then, are these firms being permitted to test autonomous vehicles (AV) on the busy streets of London?

It's part of an effort by the government to get the UK AV network ready through a new framework that allows "bus- and taxi-like" commercial services, in small fleets, to test on public roads.

A separate framework has also allowed Nissan to test autonomous driving. A fleet of Leafs took to both city and rural roads in a project that the firm says has brought autonomous driving "one step closer to reality" in the UK.

Nissan has been testing driverless Leafs in the UK

real change in our communities."

The arrival of driverless ride-hailing tech in the UK is a significant development, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, which said it is now up to both the automotive industry and the government to "keep Britain at the forefront of global innovation".

SMMT CEO Mike Hawes added: "The anticipated arrival of self-driving cars in London next year is a landmark moment, tangibly translating the ambition of Britain's advanced regulatory framework into a social and mobility revolution."

Waymo, which already has engineering hubs in London and Oxford, said the services will "help achieve London's transport priorities", including a reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the city's roads.

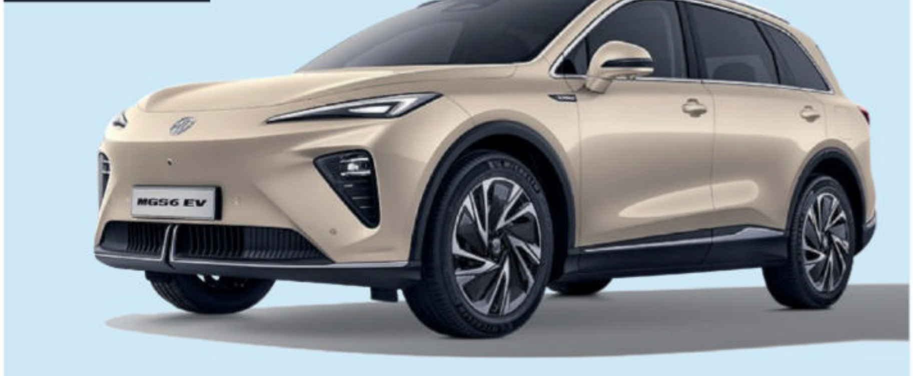
The firm's co-CEO, Tekedra Mawakana, said: "Waymo is making roads safer and transportation more accessible where we operate." She added: "We have demonstrated how to responsibly scale fully autonomous ride-hailing."

The sentiment has been backed by James Gibson, director of charity Road Safety GB. "Autonomous vehicles, such as [Waymo's], hold the potential to significantly improve road safety because, quite simply, the human driver is removed," he said.

No date has been set for when trials will begin.

WILL RIMELL

OFFICIAL PICTURE



CRASH TESTS REVEAL NEW MG BY ACCIDENT

This is the first picture of the new MG S6 EV – before you were meant to see it. Images of the new family SUV have surfaced ahead of the car's official unveiling after the model was included in the most recent group of Euro NCAP crash and safety tests.

The S6 bears a strong visual likeness to the smaller S5. Inside, it appears to have a similar digital instrument panel and steering wheel. It will be positioned between the £28,745 S5 and the new £47,995 MG IM6.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Dobson has extensive behind-the-scenes experience at Stellantis

"IT WAS A 'welcome home' in a way," says Nicola Dobson, on walking back into Peugeot's Coventry offices in January, this time as UK managing director.

"It was a nice feeling. I know so many people who work within the brand, and it was a very positive response from the team."

Dobson's experience at Peugeot began in 2000 on the graduate programme. She went on to have eight other roles across the business, including stints as Citroën's UK marketing director and leading Stellantis UK's used car operation, culminating in this opportunity.

Since Dobson rejoined, Peugeot's sales are up almost 40% year on year, at just over 70,000 units, and it has sold more cars than any other Stellantis brand in the UK, Vauxhall included.

Peugeot is challenging Hyundai, Toyota, Mercedes and Nissan for fifth spot in the UK sales charts, and of the brands that sold more than 10,000 cars in the UK last year, its growth is the largest by some margin.

Dobson says the success is a team effort, the result of work to improve stock levels and logistical operations to boost availability, plus improved marketing to get customers into dealers in the first place.

Dobson has spent time working in less heralded but ultimately crucial parts of the industry in distribution, production and managing stock, and she is in regular contact with central teams to ensure the UK is getting through the right cars and in a timely manner.

"We've been proactive trying to see where the future opportunities are, where the market is going and what the demand is, then getting the stock to meet that," she says.

Dobson says she would take roles as they came up to build her experience: "The top job at a brand in a country is always something you aspire to."

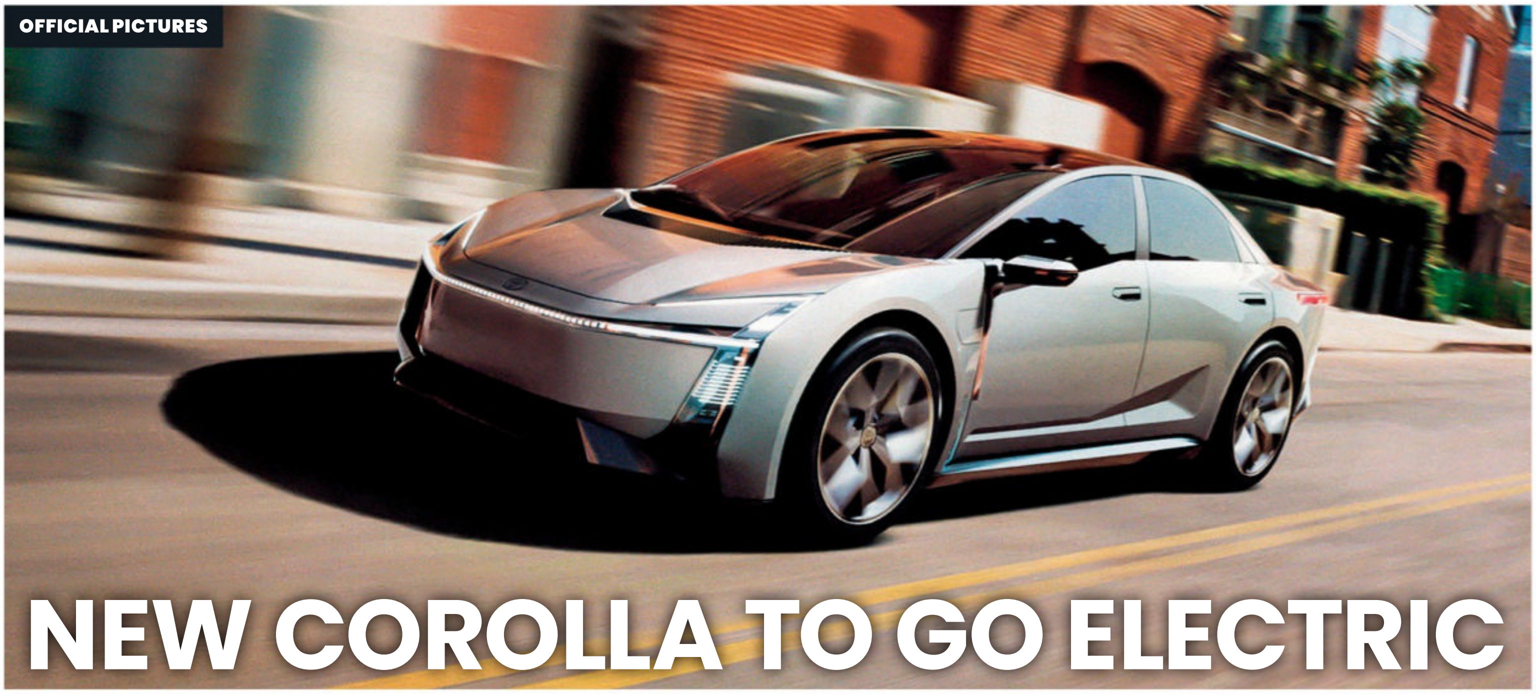
She is happy with the brand's mainstream positioning but notes the firm's push for class-leading interiors: "When you get in a Peugeot, hopefully you think it's a nice place to be."

A big change is coming with the next-generation 208 (previewed by the Polygon concept) and its Hypersquare steering 'wheel', a square-shaped steer-by-wire system.

When asked if such a radical change presents a risk to the progress made raising the appeal of Peugeot's interiors, Dobson says she sees it as bringing innovation to the masses – but adds it will be a choice for buyers, suggesting a more conventional wheel will remain as standard.

However impressive her success so far, Dobson's main goal to bring more potential customers into showrooms is clear: "We need to get more people in our cars. When they get in our cars, they think: 'Wow, this is brilliant.' They're more likely to continue their journey with Peugeot."

> **"When you get in a Peugeot, hopefully you think it's a nice place to be"**



NEW COROLLA TO GO ELECTRIC

Tokyo show concept previews next-gen model as futuristic four-door EV

Toyota will headline the Tokyo motor show with a new concept car that previews the future of the Corolla.

The Tokyo show concept is a dramatic departure visually from the current car and features what appears to be a charging port flap, suggesting the landmark adoption of a pure-electric powertrain for the 13th generation of one of the world's best-selling cars.

The design of the concept represents a significant move away from the current Corolla, which is now eight years old, with nothing to link the two other than the name. Shown in saloon form, it appears to have been sculpted for maximum aerodynamic efficiency, with a small frontal area, a streamliner-style roofline, flush-fit door handles and a small duck-tail spoiler.

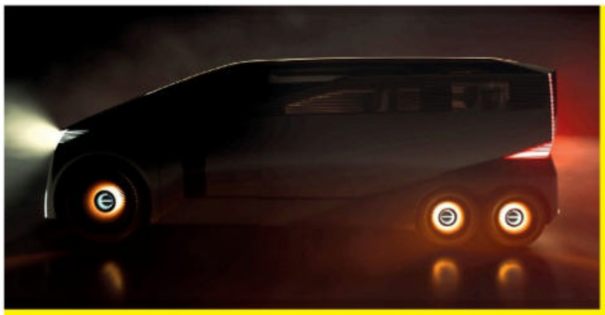
Concept has small spoiler

The concept's styling showcases the next step in the evolution of Toyota's design language – with influence from the radical concepts it unveiled at the previous Tokyo show in 2023 – and brings it in line with current Toyota models including the C-HR+ and bZ4X SUVs, to which an electric Corolla would no doubt be closely related.

As yet there is no timeline for a production Corolla EV, nor is it known if the current hybrid Corolla, built at the Toyota UK plant in Derbyshire, could continue to be sold alongside it for a period.

More details will follow when Toyota officially presents its Tokyo show cars on 29 October.

CHARLIE MARTIN



LS REIMAGINED AS A SIX-WHEEL MPV

LEXUS IS GEARING up to reinvent its seminal luxury saloon flagship, the LS, as a six-wheeled MPV.

Previewing a concept for the Tokyo show, Akio Toyoda, chairman of parent company Toyota, said the LS nameplate would now stand for 'Luxury Space' rather than the original 'Luxury Sedan' coined at the inception of the Lexus brand in the 1980s.

Toyoda said MPVs are "the new luxury shape of the future", noting that more interior space is the number one priority for buyers of premium cars, so "new packaging is needed".

The eye-catching six-wheel configuration allows for smaller rear wheels and arches, which frees up third-row cabin space.

On the viability of building such a radically different new model, Toyoda admitted: "I'm not sure if they can do that yet, but everyone is serious about it."

LFA REPLACEMENT SET FOR DECEMBER REVEAL

Toyota will officially unveil its long-awaited, V8-powered successor to the Lexus LFA supercar by the end of the year.

The supercar had been tipped for a debut at the Tokyo show, following a long preview campaign featuring several iterations of concept car and even a pair of running prototypes at the Festival of Speed –

but a countdown on the firm's website suggests the wraps will finally come off on 5 December.

The Aston Martin DB12 rival – now officially called GR GT – will then make its first public appearance at the Tokyo Auto Salon in January.

MAZDA COMMITS TO ICE

Mazda is set to reveal a new concept demonstrating its ongoing commitment to combustion-engined driver's cars, and it could use carbon-neutral petrol.

In a cryptic hint, the brand said the four-door coupé would show how "the joy of driving fuels a sustainable future", while confirming it will also show a new sustainable fuel made from algae.

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

Festival of the unpredictable: home-grown car show elicited an eclectic turnout

SUNDAY

Should you organise your own car show? Colleague Richard Bremner, a familiar name across these pages, has demonstrated three times now how well it can work. At the weekend about 40 of us, including both hacks and proper car people, gathered at Gilks' Garage Café in Kineton, just off the Fosse Way, to take lunch, kick tyres and talk cars. Officially this was Chicken Shed III, a name coined for Bremner's first event centred on a former poultry farm where he and some pals keep their cars.

As usual the instruction was to "bring something interesting", and the group obliged, turning up in everything from a Citroën 2CV to a Lamborghini Huracán, with a peppering of Porsches and Rovers plus outliers such as John Simister's 1960 Singer Gazelle and a new-shape Renault 4 from its maker's test fleet to punctuate proceedings. Bremner's own Austin 1100 failed to proceed when one side of its Hydrolastic suspension sprang a leak close to home. Even so, the event's camaraderie was every bit as special and carefree as that you'll encounter at any of the curated events I've attended this year. The Steering Committee is already suggesting we stage our own event next year.

Uusikaupunki's auto museum is a goldmine for Saab aficionados

> "We should grab Porsche bargains while we can"

MONDAY

Nothing carefree about the current state of Porsche. US tariffs are biting hard, formerly strong Chinese demand has collapsed, parts suppliers are in strife and still-active markets like ours aren't taking EVs in the numbers Porsche bosses calculated. The electric-only Macan, once billed as tomorrow's Porsche, clearly can't cut it alone, and Weissach is rushing to launch a new model line to replace today's petrol versions. All of which makes me wonder whether we should be grabbing Porsche bargains while we can. Maybe the market is oversupplied with Taycans, but that doesn't stop them being great cars.

One thing's for sure, the brand is still exceptionally strong. The 1988 Porsche Carrera 3.2 I once bought for £20k (and sold for £18k to improve my house) now retails at more than twice that, even with three times our mileage on the odometer; the tiny 2.2s and 2.4s from earlier days double that price again. The bargain 911 for me is the 996, unloved by some for funny headlights and an engine gremlin (nowadays largely conquered), but if I were buying a Porsche tomorrow, it would be a prime-spec Taycan.

TUESDAY

Because Prior and I were pod-prattling the other day about the modern-day delight of seeing healthy Saabs in the traffic, reader Alasdair Duncan has written to direct us to the Valmet museum in Uusikaupunki, Finland, where Saabs (and Opel Calibras and Porsche Boxsters, among others) were built for many years under contract. The place is like something out of the 1950s, writes Alasdair; its only interactive feature is opening and closing the odd car door. The Saab model selection is plentiful, from 96 to 9000. I looked up Uusikaupunki on the map, thinking it might make a pleasant holiday drive. Turns out to be 1400 miles from home by the shortest route.

WEDNESDAY

So ends a period of intensive Renault EV education. I still have my Renault 5 long-termer (11,000 miles and counting), but the Alpine A290 and Renault 4 derivatives that have surrounded it these past couple of weeks have departed. It has been the perfect way of affirming that the original is also the best. The 290 can be really quick in little-car conditions and is lovely inside, but you pay with less range, a bit less ride comfort and more road noise. The 4 is more spacious, but you lose some manoeuvrability and a fair bit of styling panache. Looks to me as if history is in the process of deciding that this electric 5 is as distinguished as the revered original.

AND ANOTHER THING

STEVE CROPLEY
REMEMBERING LJK SETRIGHT: WE'LL NEVER SEE
LJKセットライトを偲ぶ

Newsflash! Autocar readers in Japan are almost as long-suffering as you are. Kaoru Kojima, the lady who translates this column for Japanese readers, says it's 20 years since it started – which shows how time flies. Mind you, it's about to be 34 years for readers in English, which is crazier still.

GET IN TOUCH
steve.cropley@haymarket.com

PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

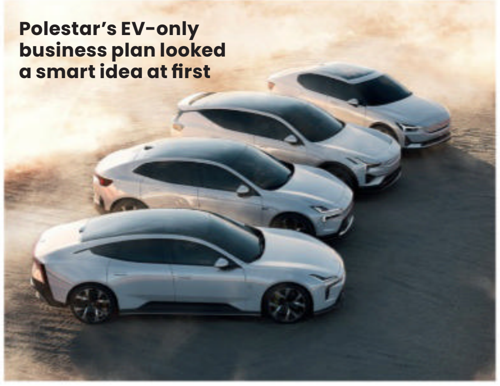
And so to the Volvo ES90, the new big electric saloon car from the famous maker of big sensible family saloons, estates and SUVs (driven, p26).

By gum, it's a striking-looking thing, isn't it? There's lots of dynamism on show. In profile it looks not unlike a Polestar 2, or wait, is that a 4, or a 5? One of them that isn't an SUV. Not that any of them is really an SUV, but I'm sure one – is it the 3? – is at least a tall estate. Not quite an estate, but close. Oh, look, I don't know.

What I do know is that the big new Volvo is electric, and also looks a bit like a car from that car maker nobody had heard of four years ago, but which I'm sure is related, somehow. Something to do with the Chinese? Anyway, loads are 80 grand and, give or take, five metres long and all sprint faster than a dachshund who's spotted a squirrel. Though I read in the news that nobody's really buying them except on grand-and-a-bit-per-month company car deals, and that there aren't enough of those to go around.

It's a pickle, isn't it? Some car makers are lobbying European regulators to say that we've got the forecasts wrong on moving to full electrification by 2035, that modest sales of big electric cars shows this, and that the only winner if we don't think again will be the Chinese car industry.

Then there are others who have bet so much on electrification that they're in an equally big muddle if the rules are relaxed. I don't know what Polestar says about it, but I think this is where it sits, as an all-new, all-electric brand confidently created knowing that everyone will be buying battery vehicles soon because they'll have to; and that designing them in Sweden, where it's stylish, but making them in China, where it's cheap, was a good idea.



Polestar's EV-only business plan looked a smart idea at first

But was it? Because if Polestar does need to pivot a bit, how can it?

To a greater or lesser extent, Volkswagen (ID), Mercedes-Benz (EQ) and others have gone down this route, creating sort-of stand-alone electric brands in the hope that customers will jump aboard.

The usual lesson, I fear, applies here: customers often don't care about brands. They don't give them a second thought and have no idea what an ID or an EQ is, and they'd only have half an inclination to find out even if it wasn't for parents' evening tonight, the gas bill coming through, whether it was Saturday or Sunday we were going to visit Barry and why has the dishwasher stopped working? In this context, a Volkswagen IDwhatnow?

> **"It's the usual lesson: people often don't care about brands"**

But where in VW's and Mercedes' cases the new branding hasn't really caught on, it's relatively easy to undo: Volkswagen can just call the ID 2 a Polo instead and still has combusted Golfs to sell, and those are names we've known since we were children.

So for car makers with sub-brands whose ICE/part-ICE cars will lift heavier for longer than expected, it's inconvenient. But if one's whole shtick is being a new electric brand – which has necessitated new design and engineering teams, factories, distribution networks, marketing and advertising departments and a host of other back-end teams separate from the mothership – what happens if a rejig is needed?

I'm reminded of when BMW introduced the 5 Series GT at around the same time (I think) as the X1. Dealers had no idea what to do with the obscure 5GT concept, because customers didn't ask for it and there wasn't much reason to nudge them in that direction. But it didn't really matter because other customers came in and knew precisely what an X1 was, which took up the slack.

But here, instead of one strong brand selling a car in every niche, with even the most vacant of customers knowing precisely what a Volvo was (it has spent its entire history building a comfortingly familiar name, after all), there are two confused and slightly gappy ranges, one of which nobody knew about and which doesn't have the prop of sensible, affordable family cars to take up the slack if things go less than splendidly.

The tl;dr of it all is, I suppose, could all of these Polestars just have been Volvos?

GET IN TOUCH
matthew.prior@haymarket.com

Volvo can straddle EV and ICE markets; new ES90 is a case in point

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Extreme H's debut, in Saudi Arabia, built on the Extreme E formula

Another motorsport landmark has been established in the deserts of Saudi Arabia this month. The first international event for racing machines powered by hydrogen fuel cells played out in Qiddiya, as the Extreme H off-road FIA World Cup finally took its bow.

Extreme H is the latest creation of alternative-fuels motorsport ringmaster Alejandro Agag, the brains behind the electric-powered Formula E and Extreme E series. The latter ran out of spark despite early support from car manufacturers and Formula 1 world champions Lewis Hamilton, Jenson Button and Nico Rosberg. But after rousing Extreme E for one final sign-off race in Qiddiya, Agag pulled off what he described as his latest Houdini act a week later with an inaugural Extreme H event featuring time trials, two-car head-to-heads and a grand final race with all eight of the Pioneer 25s built by off-road specialist Spark Racing Technologies.

Agag has been hustling to get Extreme H to launch for a couple of years, and after months of very little news, it all seemed to come together in a matter of weeks. Following confirmation of an October date, a flurry of team and driver announcements began to ping through, featuring most of those who had stayed loyal to Extreme E. Carlos Sainz Sr and Jenson Button were among those to put their names to teams and the hydrogen series has stuck to Agag's established concept of promoting gender equality, with each car having a male and female driver. The same old awkward ethical questions remain about promoting such values in Saudi Arabia – but, hey, just about every sport and even supposedly progressive comedians are accepting Saudi's riyals… So move along, smile and wave.

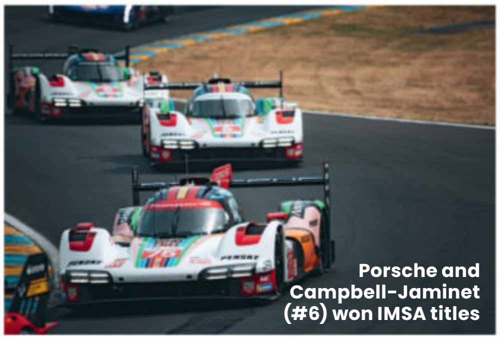
> **"Porsche losing faith in the WEC has got to be alarming"**

Jameel Motorsport was among the latest of entries, but that did not stop its Swedish rallycross ace Kevin Hansen and Australian Extreme E champion Molly Taylor from dominating a spectacular final.

What happens next isn't entirely clear. Agag announced a five-year deal with Qiddiya to host more World Cup finals and expressed an ambition for the series to travel to other locations. But this time it seems this natural showman is reining in his instinct to promise the world. For now, making Extreme H a reality with a power source that deserves and needs positive promotion should be considered an achievement and, like Extreme E, the sporting spectacle held against a breathtaking backdrop was fun and frenetic in a similar mode to rallycross. It works.

PORSCHE WITHDRAWS FROM WEC

Porsche is pulling its Penske-run factory team from the World Endurance Championship at season's end. It's a bitter blow. Okay, the WEC has an abundance of manufacturers racing in the top Hypercar class, but losing Porsche is the equivalent of Ferrari withdrawing from F1.



Porsche and Campbell–Jaminet (#6) won IMSA titles

The statement quoting board member Michael Steiner spoke vaguely of the "current circumstances" that have driven the decision. The assumption is that's a bigger-picture reference to Porsche's car sales headaches and the planned reduction in its workforce. But it's likely there's more to it than that.

Recently, motorsport boss Thomas Laudenbach has spoken (carefully) about his frustrations with the WEC. By regulation, teams are not allowed to criticise or even speak publicly about the Balance of Performance (BoP) formula by which the Hypercars are managed. But Laudenbach has pointed out that his team's lead 963 LMDh put in a near-perfect performance at the Le Mans 24 Hours in June, yet still finished a close second to Ferrari's 499P. Likewise, Le Mans marked Ferrari's fourth WEC win in succession this term – and yet since then, following a tweak to its own BoP, the domination has abruptly stopped. A degree of manipulation is at the heart of Hypercar racing and everyone involved accepts that. But dissatisfaction within the WEC ranks appears to be growing – and Porsche losing faith has got to be alarming.

Porsche Penske Motorsport will race on in the US-based IMSA series, a sign of how important the North American market is to the brand. It also remains committed to Formula E and its vast network of customer racing GT projects. At Petit Le Mans at Road Atlanta this month, Porsche wrapped up the IMSA manufacturers' and teams' titles, with Matt Campbell and Mathieu Jaminet crowned as drivers' champions, and part of the reward is an entry for Le Mans next year. So perhaps a factory 963 will still make the grid next June. But the chances of Porsche securing its grail-like 20th victory at the 24 Hours any time soon are now vastly reduced.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

Letter of the week

A LOVABLE ROGUE

I enjoy reading your My Car & I features and thought you might be interested in a story of my own. This car has been in our family from new, in 1967. AMC built only 921 Rambler Rogue Convertibles, all in 1967, and mine is right-hand drive, which makes it highly unusual, if not unique, in the UK.

My dad Stanley grew up in Kenya and trained as an engineer. My mum Monica, who was from London, persuaded him to leave the wide, open spaces of East Africa and move to smoggy ol' London town in 1954, because of the Mau Mau uprising. When he arrived, with me and my sister, both very young, he couldn't find work as an engineer, so he started selling used cars. After a while, he established Worcester Autos on the Camden Road in North London. He always drove American cars with big V8 engines; we had a succession of Chryslers, Plymouths and Chevys. He was 'king of the road', never knowingly overtaken by anyone. My sister and I would stand up as kids in the back of these amazing vehicles, screaming!

He bought this wonderful Rambler for my mum. She loved it to bits and looked a million dollars as she zoomed up our road when I was a teenager. Unfortunately, she drove the car for only six years before she passed from cancer. Because she loved the car and my dad loved her, he kept it going. He's gone now, so the car has come to me. The only person ever to smoke in it was my mum; if you open the ashtray, there are Rothmans cigarette butts with traces of her bright red lipstick still visible. She passed in 1973!

'Monica' has an electric hood, but it's never up, as she only comes out on special days when it's dry and the sun is shining. She has been loved and looked after so very well and is totally reliable. I can't tell you just how well she drives, wafting over our potholed roads like a dream. She has a 3.9-litre straight-six Jeep engine and a three-speed autobox with a column change.

She will stay in the family: when I go, she will be welcomed by my niece, Lauren, who loves her so.

Ash Medicks, Kirkcudbright, Galloway

GRRR YARIS

Toyota's GR Yaris is a great car, but the price is now a complete rip-off. When it came on sale, it started at sub-£30k. That this latest version is now priced at nearly £49k is beyond belief, as most of these additions are mainly cosmetic and will add little or nothing to the car's performance.

To show how much UK punters are being overcharged by Toyota, it's worth looking how much the GR Corolla costs in the US: the entry-level price is sub-$40k, or £30k. Admittedly there are sales taxes on top of that, but how can a mechanically similar car cost so much more here in the UK?

Ian P
Via autocar.co.uk

THE PRICE IS RIGHT

As a Mk1 GR Yaris owner, I'm happy to see the GR Yaris becoming available again while still being enhanced. The price of the Mk1 was probably too low (for Toyota) at launch. If you factor in inflation, the price of a Mk1 Circuit Pack car from 2020 is now £43k, without considering other taxes etc. The car has been gradually refined, and if you consider all the changes made I would argue that the £49k price for the new Aero Performance car is fair. Since the supply of Mk2 sold out at £46k, buyers seem to agree.

'Outraged Bunny'
Via autocar.co.uk

A WORK OF R

I'm delighted that the Volkswagen Golf Mk7.5 is noted as a generally fine thing, the GTI particularly.

In 2018, after study, research and waiting, I ordered a new Golf R. I carefully specced black metallic paint, 19in Pretoria alloys, a heated windscreen, leather seats with electric adjustment for the driver, a rear-view camera, black mirror caps and a film on the rear bumper.

The car is a wee gem: it fits in wherever we go, it's capable of way more than we're likely to ask of it (sub-5.0sec 0-60mph and limited to 155mph) and its DSG gearbox works like a charm 99.9% of the time.

Running an R doesn't empty the coffers. Age keeps insurance under £1 per day and for slightly less outlay a Volkswagen 'All In' warranty and service plan ensures a full service history and peace of mind if a big repair is required (engines and gearboxes are so dear).

General mixed use results in 32mpg, a longer run 37-ish or more if my wife's size-threes are pedalling.

GR Yaris has got a lot more expensive. Has it got a lot better, too?

The only thing that beats a Golf GTI is a Golf R, says Neil

An R does everything you ask of it: it's safe, comfy and sure-footed and will keep up with just about anything over your favourite roads, rain or shine. I'm happy to keep it while trying to justify the £20k-plus needed to upgrade to the better (electronic glitches aside) Mk8.5.

The only drawbacks for me are the large turning circle and smallish boot.

Maybe it's Mk7.5 R Estate owners who have found the yet sharper zenith?

Neil Watson
Northumberland

ASTON-ISHING

I know, I know, we aren't comparing apples with apples, but having read your test of the new Aston Martin DBX S (1 October), with its turbo lag, hard-to-access performance and sub-20mpg, I'm forced to conclude you would be better served by a Tesla Model Y Performance: instant torque, better acceleration, much cheaper to run and a third of the price. Forget the badge and the burble, and even the EV and Musk haters might think I have a point.

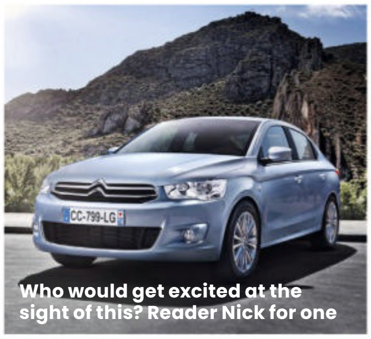
Steve Lipfriend
Via email

ELYSIAN WHEELS

I particularly enjoyed Murray Scullion's piece about foreign-market cars (Why I Love, 1 October). I'm very much a kindred spirit there and always have been.

I only went abroad once as a child in the 1970s, but my main memory of that holiday to France is the cars: a Citroën Ami 6 with a 'breezeway' rear window, a Renault Floride and other forbidden fruit.

More recently, on a holiday to Gran Canaria, I was delighted to bag a Citroën C-Elysée hire car – objectively pretty rubbish but



Who would get excited at the sight of this? Reader Nick for one

a real treat for me.

The best place to go, though, is Malta. It's absolutely crammed with real oddballs: lots of JDM small cars, unidentified Kias and strange Toyota Yaris lookalikes. Heaven to a weird car nerd like me.

Nick Smith
Via email

BUY NOW, PAY LATER

I'm currently looking into buying a Mercedes-AMG CLE 53. It's packed with technology, including adaptive cruise control, but they tell me I will have to pay a subscription amounting to £2500 over five years to have it activated. What a rip-off!

I understand other manufacturers charge in a similar way to activate functions such as heated seats. What next, a subscription to activate the electric windows?

This is an unwelcome development that I'm sure many people are unaware of.

Mike Poole
Anglesey

EQUINE ENQUIRY

Like you, I will miss the sound of the internal combustion engine as EVs take over, but I wonder how the new 'horseless carriages' were received by road users well over a century ago. Did they miss the sound of 'clip-clop' as they progressed and the sound of 'clippety-clop, clippety-clop' from performance models?

Steve Banbury
Towcester, Northamptonshire

In 1896, The Autocar said: "Like our readers, we come of a race who have loved the horse, his noises and even his odours for many a thousand years. [It has been critically implied] that the noise of an autocar running can be heard a mile off, but we can stoutly aver that we have never heard one that gave so much audible warning of its approach as a horse and carriage. Though autocars may be 3.5hp, they do not make so much noise as a single horse with his clanking iron shoes."

Weekly winner

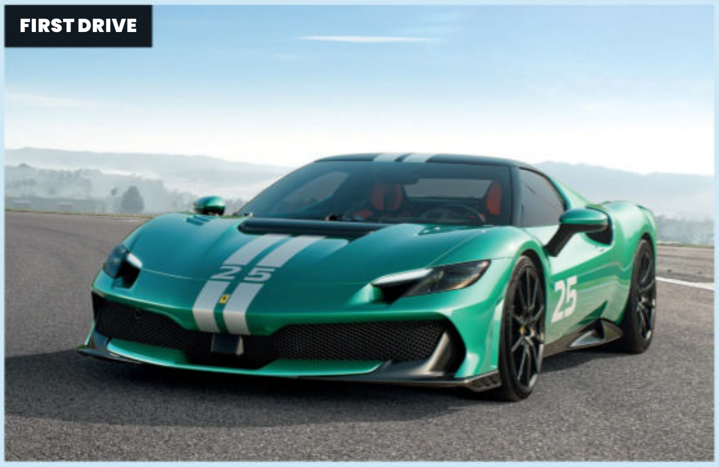
Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 29 OCTOBER

FIRST DRIVE



FERRARI 296 SPECIALE

Track-honed 868bhp two-seater has trick aero, tuned suspension and the potential for 0-62mph in 2.8sec and 124-0mph in 106m. We drive it

EXCLUSIVE

AUDI CONCEPT C DRIVEN

We sample the TT-inspired sports car – with Audi's CEO riding shotgun

FEATURE

HOW TO HIT 200MPH IN THE UK

What's it like to drive a McLaren around Silverstone? Will Rimell finds out

EVERY WEEK

LIVING WITH A...

VOLKSWAGEN TAYRON

The seven-seat SUV no one has heard of joins our fleet

USED GUIDE

DACIA SANDERO

Once the UK's cheapest car – and now considerably cheaper

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 6.10.25, FRANKFURT, GERMANY **ON SALE** DECEMBER

KIA K4

Indirect Ceed successor is an all-new Golf-rivalling petrol hatchback tuned specifically for Europe

In an era when some firms are giving up on petrol-powered family hatchbacks – farewell, Ford Focus; au revoir, Audi A1 – here's something novel: a shiny new one. And not even 'heavy facelift' new. This is an entirely new car with new styling and a new nameplate, only the merest hint of electrification and even the option of a manual gearbox. It's been years since we saw a new model like this – 2019, in fact, when Skoda unveiled the Scala. So for anyone sad about a quite literal loss of Focus, say hello to the new Kia K4.

It's a neat flex: Kia is more advanced than many of its rivals when it comes to electrification but, in this amorphous transition phase, it doesn't want to lose its presence in the still-popular European petrol hatch market. And it has the flexibility to meet that demand, thanks to both its global manufacturing footprint and a growing EV range that ensures it can hit ZEV targets.

The K4, which Kia claims straddles the C- and D-segments, essentially fills the gap in its UK line-up left by the departed Ceed. However, Kia is at pains to point out that it's an indirect successor, not least because the Ceed was a European-specific model (Ceed stands for European Economic Community, European Development – abbreviated as CEEED in some European languages, and the apostrophe originally in the name was to reduce the number of 'e's) and the K4 is a global model. It sits on a version of the platform used for the Kia Niro and Hyundai Kona, will be built in Mexico and will be offered as a hatch and a saloon, although we'll get only the hatch.

Despite being a global car, there is local influence here with the input of Kia's European development team. You might have read reviews elsewhere of the American K4 saloon, but the chassis and suspension of European hatches have been tuned specifically for the roads ▸

TESTER'S NOTE
The only optional extra offered on the K4 is the exterior paint colour. There are nine choices, but only White Pearl is standard. Our test car was Sparkling Yellow, which has a hint of 1996 Jordan Formula 1 car to it. **JA**

> "The suspension copes well with bumps and the car feels planted and stable on the road"

◀ here. So our outing in this pre-production car is the first time a UK publication has driven a K4 in a spec you'll actually be able to buy.

The UK powertrain line-up will be limited to two turbocharged units at launch: a 113bhp 1.0-litre 48V mild hybrid and a 1.6-litre petrol offered with either 147bhp – as tested here – or 177bhp. Both engines are offered with a seven-speed dual-clutch automatic. The 1.0 can also be had with a six-speed manual, although if you want the stick shift, you'll have to settle for entry-level Pure trim.

At 4440mm, the K4 is long for a C-segment hatch. Although it's nearly identical in its dimensions to a Mazda 3, it's notably longer than both the Ceed it succeeds and the Volkswagen Golf that serves as the omnipresent class leader every rival is out to beat. The 438-litre boot is also notably bigger than the Golf's.

With a long bonnet, the K4 sits lower and wider than many C-segment hatches, which gives it real presence. It's the first petrol-powered Kia in Europe designed from scratch under the firm's 'Opposites United' design language, which to this tester gives it a more purposeful look than previous generations of Kia, such as the slightly bulbous Ceed. And while more conventional, it certainly looks less awkward than its EV4 electric equivalent.

Our pre-production test car – which, says Kia, is essentially representative of production models – was in European GT-Line spec, broadly equivalent to the top GT-Line S trim that will be offered in the UK. That means it has 18in wheels (other versions sit on 16s and 17s), a sunroof and lots of sporty exterior and interior details.

The interior is well-worn Kia territory: the main dashboard is composed of three screens (12.3in versions for the driver display and infotainment and a 5.3in one for the heating controls) housed in a single unit and there are a useful number of proper buttons. Everything feels solidly built and top-spec models such as this gain pleasantries such as heated front and rear seats, a smartphone charger, an optional digital key and a powerful Harman Kardon stereo. That said, even the two-tone steering wheel design and contrast highlights of the artificial leather seats on our top-spec car aren't enough to really lift the interior into premium territory. There isn't an abundance of character or warmth here, but it's all perfectly practical. There's a decent amount of rear room too.

The four-cylinder turbo is pleasingly refined and ideal for daily driving, even if it is a little sluggish under acceleration. It's all relative, though: as the K4's official 0-62mph time of 9.1sec suggests, it has enough performance for the real world, and once you're moving, peak torque is available from 1500rpm so it picks up well from there. The automatic gearbox keeps pace well and only if you're really aggressive with the throttle will you find it struggling to keep up.

Ultimately, though, the powertrain is better at cruising once it's up to pace than getting there. Push hard enough and it can whine a little, but nothing abnormal for a 1.6 turbo. Selecting Sport mode

It's longer than a Golf, at 4400mm, and has visual presence

Kia-typical cabin is easy to use and feels solidly assembled

SO WHY IS IT CALLED THE K4?

A model built in Mexico couldn't carry the Ceed name (given it literally has 'European' baked into its title). But why K4?

Well, it's part of Kia's current model-naming approach: ICE saloons and hatches are labelled K, bespoke electric models EV; then each model features a number denoting its size in the line-up. So in Kia's global range, the K4 sits above the B-segment K3 but below the D-segment K5 (formerly the Optima) and the larger Korean-only K8 and K9 (pictured). It just looks a bit odd because we don't get any of those in the UK.

In fact, the only other petrol hatch in Kia's UK line-up is the Picanto city car, which will keep its name because it's so well established. That same logic is being applied to Kia's SUV range, which will stick with full names beginning with S (Stonic, Sportage, Sorento etc). All clear?

makes it a little more aggressive and the dual-clutch 'box holds gears for longer, and there's enough power to handle the K4's kerb weight well.

All European K4 models feature fully independent suspension – "unlike certain other models" in the segment, Kia cheekily notes in its press pack – with MacPherson struts up front and a multi-link rear. Kia says the set-up has been tuned for Europe so the K4 "handles keenly and rides comfortably". It generally succeeds with the latter: the suspension copes well with bumps and the car feels well planted and stable on the road.

Does it handle keenly? Well, there is some pep to it. The K4 holds up well if you throw it into a corner and the steering is light and direct. But it's not as outright sporty as its slightly edgy styling might suggest. Still, there's decent potential in the chassis here were Kia to look at a full-GT version. All told, while I don't think the K4 necessarily distinguishes itself from other C-segment hatches in the dynamics or performance department, it certainly doesn't disgrace itself. And there's still that dash of old-school engagement that remains missing from many heavier electric saloons.

One area where the K4 does look strong is on price: entry-level Pure models with the 1.0-litre manual will start from £25,995, while the GT-Line S model tested here is priced at £33,995. The more powerful 177bhp engine pushes that to £36,195. That's a notable uplift from the Ceed but understandable: while that model felt a bit like a budget alternative, the K4 comes across as a distinctly more rounded, complete package. Despite that, it undercuts the likes of class rivals such as the Golf, Vauxhall Astra and Toyota Corolla. It probably doesn't quite have the Golf's all-round dash of premium sheen, but it should be right in the mix otherwise.

Given how competitive the family hatch class is in Europe – even with some recent departures – switching from a car developed purely for this region to a global model was a clear risk, but on first impressions it has paid off. This should be a strong contender that gives prospective Golf buyers something else to think about. Given we live in the age of SUVs and the industry is progressing towards electric, there's a reason car firms aren't queueing up to launch C-segment petrol hatchbacks these days, but the K4 proves they still have a worthy role to play.

JAMES ATTWOOD

Higher specs have 18in, others 16s or 17s. All models are roomy

TECH SPEC

KIA K4 GT-LINE S

A welcome addition that can hold its own against long-standing class rivals, offering a rounded package that is strong value for money

Price £33,995
Engine 4 cyls in line, 1598cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 147bhp at 4500-6000rpm
Torque 184lb ft at 1500-4500rpm
Gearbox 7-spd dual-clutch automatic, FWD
Kerb weight 1517kg
0-62mph 9.1sec
Top speed 129mph
Economy na
CO_2, tax band na
Rivals Mazda 3, Vauxhall Astra, Volkswagen Golf

TESTED 6.10.25, NICE, FRANCE **DELIVERIES** FEBRUARY 2026

VOLVO ES90

Swedish brand goes against the grain with an esoteric electric saloon

Volvo needs something to help it out of a fiscal rut, but the new ES90 is unlikely to be of much use. Imagine the most commercially questionable product today, given prevailing market sentiments. Right up there alongside an electric hypercar bearing the licensed, little-known branding of a reanimated marque is a premium electric vehicle that is neither a play-it-safe SUV nor a traditional saloon. That Volvo is not even trying to sell the £69,000 ES90 in the US, its largest market, is the cherry on top – the ES90 hails from Chengdu, where Volvo has been making cars since 2013, and massive American tariffs for China-built cars make it a non-starter.

Should the very real prospect of tepid sales prejudice us against the idea of ES90? Quite the opposite. A car's interest to enthusiasts is often inversely proportional to its sales potential – the Citroën SM sold miserably and, as it happens, was also precluded from the US market. Future-legend status is perhaps out of reach for the ES90, but the facts are that it has an agreeable balance of ride and handling and right now it charges faster than any of its German rivals. It is also much easier on the eye both inside and out – if you can forgive the taxi-style protuberance that houses the lidar sensor. We'll get to the caveats in a moment, but despite them the ES90 is just the kind of non-obvious car you end up liking as the miles go by.

Beneath the bluff body sits the

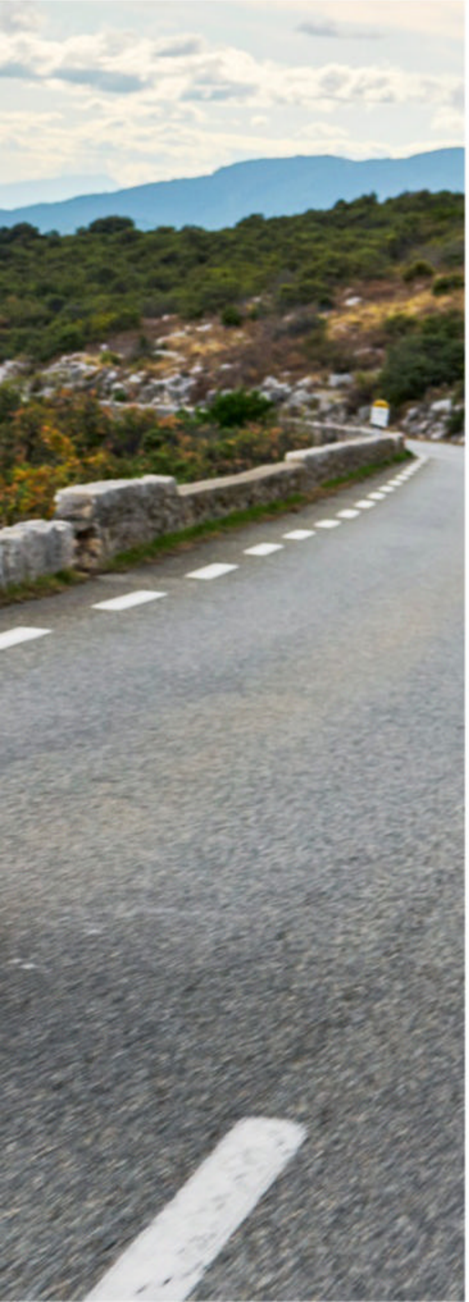
Slightly raised styling with a high beltline puts the ES90 in its own niche

same SPA2 platform you'll find under the EX90, which is the more expensive, SUV-bodied version of these new-era Volvos. For now, the difference is that the ES has an 800V architecture; the slightly longer EX will make do with 400V until 2026-model-year cars hit the road.

It gives the entry point of the range – the rear-drive, 329bhp Single Motor Extended Range Plus – a peak charging rate of 350kW and a claimed range of 401 miles. Four-wheel-drive variants, with their slightly larger batteries, go a bit farther. Both the 443bhp ES90 Twin Motor and the 671bhp Twin Motor Performance are on course for a claimed 435-mile range. They get 102kWh of usable capacity, while the single-motor car has 88kWh. It makes you wonder why Volvo didn't give the bigger battery to all three.

As usual with Volvo there will be some variability in how the ES90 conducts itself on the move. There are no fewer than three wheel sizes, ranging from 20in to 22in (our car wore the largest), and adaptive dampers with dual-chamber air springs are optional on basic Plus trim and standard on Ultra. Otherwise you get a passive spring-and-damper set-up. Note that the air springs are not the same as you might have experienced on an S90 or more likely the XC90. The hardware is new, and along with a wheelbase that's 120mm or so longer, and exceedingly good seats (witness the thickness of the backs!), it partly explains why the ES90 can be so isolating when it hits its stride. It is fabulously smooth and quiet at times. The raised hip point, set slightly incongruously against the saloon-like glasshouse, makes it feel like a Rolls-Royce Phantom understudy – or at least it would, had Volvo finally cracked low-speed ride quality. Perhaps smaller wheels would have helped, but a fidgety trundle remains the first chink in the case for plush, executive Volvos.

The ES90 is better suited to gently flowing roads than mountain switchbacks



Scuttle is high, which doesn't help visibility, but turning circle is good

"The ES90 can be isolating when it hits its stride. It is fabulously smooth and quiet at times"

The second chink lurks inside. Such an uncluttered dashboard was begging for a neatly integrated display, but alas the ES90's 14.5in touchscreen is curtly bolted on. This isn't the issue, though, and neither is this Android-based system's superb crispness and responsiveness. The problem is that the software simply tries to do too much. It is tiring to have to write again about how door mirror controls should be physical, not digital. Same for the lighting. It's an approach that throws up irritating quirks. For example, if you are reversing into a tight space and find you want to angle the mirror down, you need to come out of reverse via the steering column stalk because the screen won't deviate from showing the rear camera while the gear is engaged, so you can't access the mirror control.

Assuming you can live with this, the ES90's is a fine cabin: thoughtfully wrought with touchpoints that feel expensive. Unlike in the EX90 SUV, there's also the option of dimming the glass roof. But for the faintly high floor (cutouts for your feet in the battery pack would have done wonders), the back of the cabin is also spacious yet enveloping, with plenty of knee room and low-set shoulders for the front seats enhancing the lounge-like atmosphere. In a city ▶

◂ whose roads are in good nick, the ES90 would be an enviable tool for chauffeuring. Elsewhere, rear visibility could be better, but given Polestar's recent approach, be grateful for having glass at all.

And from the driver's seat? Launching the ES90 on a route that included snippets of La Turbie hillclimb was a bold move. The car weighs around 2.4 tonnes and is five metres long, with no switchback-friendly rear-axle steering. It also has quite uncommunicative steering, a high scuttle and those teeth-itchingly kerbable alloys, all of which make it perfectly unsuited to the mountainside rat runs of the French Riviera. And yet this car does have an ease about it even in tricky environments. It may lack rear-steer, but the turning circle is as tight as a BMW i5's even when that car is fitted with Integral Active Steering. The steering is also elegantly sped, and the ES90 delivers a perfectly calibrated accelerator. With the EPAS in its lighter map and the car's forceful one-pedal mode deactivated, it flows along neatly, feeling narrower than an i5 or Mercedes EQE, albeit with more old-world limo ponderousness in the body movements. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, and in fact it can be quite charming.

Given the limitations of the launch route, I can't tell you much about how efficient the ES90 is at a fast cruise, or how it feels when you really start to play around with the rear-driven chassis of the single-motor model tested here. Our test car averaged a creditable 3.0mpkWh on a slow and tortuous journey with plenty of stop-start in Nice, while on the few bits of open road we hit, its chassis balance was inoffensive and 'correct' but not exactly engaging. Stick to an i5 for that. But for something different and capable, the ES90 is worth a look, with the added appeal that you are, of course, unlikely to see many others on the road.

RICHARD LANE

The floor is high, but there's lots of rear room otherwise

There's a small frunk, but total luggage space of 446 litres trails a BMW i5

TECH SPEC

VOLVO ES90 SINGLE MOTOR EXTENDED RANGE ULTRA

Familiar Volvo usability frustrations linger on here, but the niche ES90 has appeal nonetheless

Price £79,160
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 329bhp at 4900-7000rpm
Torque 354lb ft at 0-4800rpm
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2410kg
0-62mph 6.6sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 92.0/88.0kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 400 miles, 3.9mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BMW i5 eDrive40 Sport Edition, Genesis G80 Electric Dynamic

TESTER'S NOTE

For the single-motor car, Ultra spec adds £10k to the price and brings the 'high-definition' headlights, air springs, the electrochromatic roof and power-reclining backrests, among other bits of kit. At launch, both twin-motor variants will come only in Ultra guise. **RL**

> "It flows along neatly, feeling narrower than a BMW i5 or Mercedes EQE"

UK VERDICTS

TESTER'S NOTE

Several A-Class iterations ago I drove some Merc engineers on the Fosse Way, which is famous for body-disturbing bumps typical of our roads, to show their car could have used more UK development. They agreed. The effect is smaller now, but it's still detectable. **SC**

TESTED 14.10.25, GLOUCESTERSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

MERCEDES-BENZ CLA

Long-range electric four-door coupé tests its mettle on UK roads

The new Mercedes CLA is already becoming familiar. We've been seeing positive reviews from foreign parts since mid-year and, as you read this, the company is in its fifth week of selling the model in the UK, having been anxious to reduce a very solid backlog of orders – a problem more EV sellers doubtless wish they had.

What no one has done until now is report on a CLA drive in this country, where road surfaces are notably different from other countries in Europe. So on the first day of test car availability, we took a single-motor, rear-drive CLA 250+, likely to be the most popular version here, and drove it on familiar roads to see how it fared against rivals.

Details of the CLA's impressive specifications are well known: it boasts leading powertrain efficiency brought by a two-speed gearbox that holds its lower ratio until about 65mph, when at a steady cruise you can just feel the higher ratio kick in to lengthen gearing and preserve energy. This is augmented by an advanced battery and motor, a super-efficient silicon-carbide inverter, a slippery body with a drag coefficient of just 0.21 and a comparatively low weight (two tonnes) for a car with an impressive claimed battery range of 484 miles. Until now, Mercedes has been half a step behind the others. CLA catapults it into the lead.

It's a very nicely built and equipped car, and it comes with so much computing power its internal brain – described by Mercedes people as a 'supercomputer' – needs its own liquid cooling system. The CLA's steel suspension – struts in front, multi-link behind – comes with dampers that offer several settings including Comfort, Eco and Sport. Select one or other and the steering and accelerator efforts change in sympathy.

So how does the CLA handle British roads? Mostly well, without quite showing the alacrity of other models that have been truly developed here. It is poised, capable and pretty quiet over pockmarked bitumen – leaving you with an impression of strength and capability. The steering, which puts a pleasantly thick-rimmed wheel into your hands, is accurate and free from kick-back. But in Comfort and Eco it seems a shade too light, while in Sport it's firmer but seems to lose detail. It's never quite perfect.

This impression is echoed when you take to the many UK roads with low-frequency, high-amplitude bumps, the kind that cause bounce in many cars. In Comfort mode the car does okay, but here and there you can't help thinking 'comfort' isn't quite the word; a shade more control would do it. Select Sport mode and you get a shorter ride, but it's often a bit too short.

Bottom line: as in so many cars with a choice of two rates, one is a whisker firm, the other a shade floppy. Freely, I admit that many owners will never notice, and the new CLA generally copes well with whatever you chuck at it. But it isn't perfect, which is a shame because there's a lot about this car in other areas that achieves true excellence.

STEVE CROPLEY

CLA rides nicely for the most part, but Comfort mode could cosset more

Steering is either too light or lacking in feel, depending on mode

TECH SPEC

MERCEDES CLA 250+ WITH EQ TECHNOLOGY AMG LINE PREMIUM

Advanced EV brings impressive new capability but could have done with more UK suspension development

★★★★½

Price £51,770
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 268bhp
Torque 247lb ft
Gearbox 2-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight 2055kg
0-62mph 6.7sec
Top speed 130mph
Battery 85.5kWh
Range, economy 484 miles, 4.7-5.0mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BMW i4, Tesla Model 3, Hyundai Ioniq 6

TESTED 13.10.25, KENT **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

MAZDA 6E

A test on UK roads reveals if this EV truly does drive like a typical Mazda

Cabin feels swish but most controls are via the touchscreen

Good steering lets you place this large car with accuracy

The 6e is Mazda's first all-electric saloon, and although it is still several months away from arriving in the UK, the car is already on sale in mainland Europe, where we drove it earlier in the year. Now we've had the chance to test it on UK roads, albeit in a left-hand-drive version.

Built in partnership with Chinese car maker Changan, the 6e shares its underpinnings with the Deepal SL03. However, Mazda insists its car delivers a distinctly Japanese flavour, with the polished dynamics and driver-focused character the brand is known for. More on that in a moment.

Two battery options will be available when the 6e goes on sale in the UK early next year. The line-up will kick off with a 68.8kWh battery offering 298 miles and an 80kWh unit good for 343 miles.

Unusually, the smaller-battery version delivers greater power, at 255bhp, while the long-range model has 241bhp. Additionally, the smaller battery has a much faster charging rate of 165kW, compared with the larger battery's 90kW.

Our test car, the long-range, 241bhp model, completes 0-62mph in a reasonably brisk 7.8sec. Out on the road, power is delivered smoothly but it doesn't feel particularly quick. It tails off fairly quickly, too, and a BMW i4 certainly feels keener to push on under harder acceleration. However, there's more than enough power here for smooth motorway driving, quick merging and overtaking.

The 6e will face some tough competition where ride comfort and driving dynamism are concerned. We highlighted the car's wooden secondary ride on our earlier drive and the 6e can't match the class-leading rolling refinement of the Volkswagen ID 7 on the UK's battered and scarred roads, either. It feels stiff and restless at low speeds, although it does settle down slightly on faster A-roads. The cabin is at least well insulated from wind noise and is quiet, save for some road roar.

On more demanding roads, the 6e's steering feels well balanced and direct, making this quite large car easy to place on a winding B-road. That said, little here resembles Mazda's traditional dynamism. If enjoyment and engagement are what you're after, the lighter, sharper Tesla Model 3 is the more entertaining option.

On narrower stretches of road, the ADAS functions prove seriously frustrating. The 6e offers the usual mix of overspeed warning, driver monitoring and lane keeping assistance, the last of which is keen to overcorrect. The saloon's bulk doesn't help here and it also takes several clicks on the confusing touchscreen to turn them off.

Instead of Mazda's usual button-led set-up, every key function – including mirror adjustment, climate control, heated seats and even wiper settings – is operated via that huge, 14.6in touchscreen, which flanks a 10.2in digital driver display. It's less than ideal.

Practicality is otherwise good, though, with lots of leg room front and back, plus a 446-litre boot (measured to the ceiling) and a 72-litre space under the bonnet.

Mazda hasn't confirmed UK specs yet, but Takumi gets synthetic leather upholstery and Takumi Plus a more premium-feeling suede and leather combination. Both are luxurious and comfortable to sit in.

Our test drive produced middling efficiency of 3.3mpkWh over varied roads. With the car's 75kWh usable battery capacity, that equates to around 248 miles on a full charge – almost 100 miles down on Mazda's claims. It's also disappointing that its 90kW charging speed is less than half as quick as that of most key rivals.

Mazda hasn't revealed UK pricing yet either and wouldn't be drawn on whether it would match the €44,900 (£38,750) starting price in mainland Europe. If it does, that would undercut its key rivals, including the ID 7, Mercedes CLA EQ and Polestar 2. It would also go some way to compensating for the 6e's distinctly unremarkable driving capabilities.

JACK WARRICK

TECH SPEC

MAZDA 6E 80KWH TAKUMI PLUS

Classy option but bland to drive. Some usability frustrations too. UK price will be a vital consideration

★★★⯨☆

Price £40,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 241bhp
Torque 236lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 1962kg
0-62mph 7.8sec
Top speed 108mph
Battery 80/75kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 343 miles, 3.7mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Tesla Model 3 Rear-Wheel Drive, Polestar 2 Standard Range Single Motor

TESTER'S NOTE

The 6e is a big car. It's only slightly shorter than the CX-80 SUV and, in its class, just the MG IM5 and Volkswagen ID 7 are longer. **JW**

TESTER'S NOTE

What I love most about Azure-spec Bentleys is the way they embrace the chrome brightwork – that Crewe does so brilliantly – and reject oh-so-fashionable gloss black body trim. Some cars deserve to be shiny, and this is one. **MS**

TESTED 15.10.25, CHESHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

BENTLEY FLYING SPUR AZURE

Crewe's plug-in hybrid limousine aims to restrain itself in 671bhp guise

If I told you there was a new Bentley Flying Spur with nearly 700bhp and sub-4.0sec 0-60mph potential, you probably wouldn't expect it to be the soft-pedal, looking-after-the-pennies option.

That's the point. Crewe now has both High Performance and Ultra Performance versions of its V8 plug-in hybrid powertrains, but you really wouldn't feel short-changed with the former, which powers all 'core' and Azure versions of the Flying Spur limo. Go for a model below Azure, Speed or Mulliner billing and you can – just – buy a Flying Spur for less than £200,000.

Materially, there is now no significant difference between each version of this car. The High Performance hybrid system produces a bit less power and torque than its marginally less immodestly named sibling, but it uses the same twin-turbo V8/ electric hardware. The 'lesser' Spurs also use the same active air springs, active four-wheel steering, active torque vectoring and active anti-roll bar systems as their pokier cousins. What separates a Mulliner or Speed from an Azure or below, then, besides an extra electronically conjured 100bhp, is just clever calibration – and you have to be using Sport mode in the more powerful versions to get the benefit anyway.

Bentley says Azure versions of the Spur are tailored for comfort and 'wellness'. That may sound like bourgeois cobblers – but, sure enough, this car is likely to leave you feeling pretty, well, well.

The cosseting cabin of our test car was beautifully upholstered in Beluga leather, with mirror-finish burr walnut wood veneer and glistening knurled metal brightwork. Crewe's interiors remain a cut above for enticing tactile quality and finish. Digital tech is integrated sparingly and discreetly, and the tactile physical switchgear is both a joy to use and easy to operate. Front seat comfort is sumptuous; in the back outright space isn't vast (the Bentagya EWB covers that), but the richness of the surroundings makes you feel as if you're living a very charmed life.

There are the usual Sport, Comfort, Custom and Bentley modes, with the hybrid system's V8 woofling into animation invitingly when you select Sport; it tends to stay shut down and allow the car to run electrically as much as possible in Bentley and Comfort.

Mechanical refinement is excellent and drivability mostly similar – although this tester isn't keen on the way the hybrid system automatically fades trailing throttle regen up and down as the car ebbs and flows in traffic: it makes initial brake feel unhelpfully changeable.

Ride and handling is harder to fault. Bentley's active suspension and steering tech makes it nimbler at lower speeds than you expect. The 22in wheels conduct a bit of surface roar and secondary fidget into the cabin, but the car ushers itself along most surfaces with supple isolation and genteel control. It never lets either wheels or body float or rebound unchecked, yet the cabin is calm, filtered and secluded from any serious disturbance.

There's more power and pace on tap than a 2.5-tonne limo ever needed. Does that mean the Flying Spur is a better car for having a simpler luxury agenda? Is less actually more here? Not necessarily. But choice is king. And I don't think there's a bad one you can make.

MATT SAUNDERS

Supple, isolated ride is punctuated only by some intrusion from 22in alloys

Luxurious cabin has tactile physical controls and discreet digital tech

TECH SPEC

BENTLEY FLYING SPUR AZURE

Luxury-first agenda suits four-door Bentley GT well, and it shoulders its PHEV powertrain without struggling

★★★★⯨

Price £228,900
Engine V8, 3996cc, twin-turbocharged, petrol, plus electric motor
Power 671bhp
Torque 686lb ft
Gearbox 8-spd dual-clutch automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2571kg
0-62mph 3.9sec
Top speed 177mph
Battery 25.9kWh (total)
Economy 64.2mpg
Electric range 50 miles
CO_2, tax band 100g/km, 26%
Rivals Mercedes-Maybach S680, Rolls-Royce Ghost S2

TESTED 9.10.25, OXFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

SUZUKI eVITARA

Twin to the Toyota Urban Cruiser takes to UK roads in dual-motor guise

Seats are comfy but the infotainment is decidedly below par

Its road manners feel mature and it's brisk below 60mph

The eVitara, Suzuki's first EV, has made it to the UK in production form. We've previously driven a prototype at Millbrook, tried the identical Toyota Urban Cruiser in Spain and now we've finally done some real miles on UK roads.

To recap, Toyota and Suzuki have an agreement to share models and engineering, which has produced Suzuki-badged Toyotas such as the Swace (a Corolla) and the Across (a RAV4) and now Suzuki has led the project to develop a joint small electric SUV. Think Ford Puma Gen-E and Renault 4 territory.

It uses an adapted version of the same architecture as Suzuki's petrol models but with some Toyota bits grafted on. Batteries are LFP – 49 or 61kWh – and, rather unusually for the class, there is a four-wheel-drive version with dual motors and 181bhp. Most eVitaras will be front-wheel drive, with 142bhp or 172bhp.

Suzuki sent us the dual-motor version, which is pleasantly brisk, particularly at lower speeds and when there's plenty of charge in the battery. At motorway speed and with a lower state of charge, performance drops noticeably, albeit not problematically, though that is no longer usually the case with EVs. Acceleration and regen are smooth, but there's no true one-pedal or freewheeling mode.

The rest of the driving experience is mature. It rides well for a car in this class, the steering is precise and well weighted and the handling balance is surprisingly pointy.

The interior is attractive enough, if a bit plain, and the driving position and seat comfort are excellent. But it's let down by the touchscreen. Its slow responses and unsophisticated graphics would be forgivable if you could just dial up smartphone mirroring and ignore the standard interface. But you need it to turn off the intrusive ADAS features and to control the climate. Requiring five taps of some very small buttons on a very laggy screen to adjust the heated seats is unacceptable.

Space in the back and the boot are quite tight compared with slightly bigger alternatives like a Kia EV3, but decent enough relative to the Puma and the 4. The sliding rear bench makes it pretty flexible.

Overall, it's relatively good news, then, until you come to the EV aspect. Over a mixed route, my dual-motor test car returned 3.0mpkWh, which is dreadful for this size of car. It particularly seemed to drop off a cliff above 60mph, so it might be okay if you do a lot of town driving. You would hope the single-motor version is slightly more efficient but, even so, it is likely to be some way off the best.

I didn't do a full charging test, but I did hook it up to a fast charger at 10% state of charge, and the most I saw was 67kW, which is off the pace as well.

All of this, combined with the motors that run out of puff at higher speeds and low charge, is the result of a company that knows how to make cars but has limited experience or expertise with EVs.

The eVitara doesn't currently get the government EV grant, but Suzuki has lowered prices in response. They now start at £26,249 for the 49kWh model. That's about level with the Puma and 4. It's £29,249 for the 61kWh, which gets a bit more range on paper than those rivals, and £32,049 for the better-equipped Ultra trim. Given its weaknesses, it ought to play the value card more than it does.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

SUZUKI eVITARA ALLGRIP-E ULTRA

Nice to drive, comfortable and moderately roomy, but behind the curve for infotainment and EV tech

★★★☆☆

Price £34,049
Engine Two permanent magnet synchronous motors
Power 181bhp
Torque 226lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 1899kg
0-62mph 7.4sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 61/60kWh (total/est usable)
Range, economy 245 miles, 3.7mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Kia EV3, Skoda Elroq

TESTER'S NOTE

The eVitara and the Urban Cruiser are the only small EVs to be available with dual motors and four-wheel drive, which will give them some niche appeal, but there's a reason other manufacturers don't bother: there's unlikely to be much demand. **IV**

TESTER'S NOTE
For once the ADAS feel like a positive. They were so well integrated that I only realised they were on half an hour in and they can always be turned off by pushing a physical button. **AW**

TESTED 15.10.25, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE **DELIVERIES** NOW

CITROEN E-C3 AIRCROSS

Electric SUVs get no cheaper than this five-seater, but is it good value?

Unlike the C3 Aircross hybrid (Road Test, p34), you can think of the ë-C3 Aircross as more like an ë-C3 estate. Whereas the hybrid can be had with seven seats, the EV is a strict five-seater and, as such, looks and feels like a stretched version of its supermini sibling, even though it's officially an SUV. But either way, there is nothing offensive about the design, which is a theme we'll return to.

Seating options aside, it's all but indistinguishable from the hybrid versions inside. The plastics generally feel and look cheap, but then this is the cheapest electric SUV on the market, priced from £21,595 after the Electric Car Grant. So its fabric dashboard trim, textured seats and plethora of easy-to-use buttons are to be welcomed.

Ergonomically, too, it's mostly good. There's plenty of adjustment in the steering wheel and driver's seat and the 'head-up display' (which isn't, because it's a screen integrated into the top of the dashboard) falls only just below your line of sight.

The 10in infotainment display is within reasonable reach, but the best bit is that you rarely need to look at the low-res screen because there are physical buttons for the temperature, fan speed and direction (and heated seats and windscreen in the top-spec Max), as well as cruise and radio controls on the steering wheel.

If there is a problem up front, it's the seats. They look good and feel squishy, but they lack support and made this tester sore after just 45 minutes.

All ë-C3s have a rear bench sited further back than the middle row in the seven-seat hybrid. This creates plenty of knee room to match the head room, although the high floor means you can't squeeze your feet under the front seats and taller adults will lack under-thigh support. The boot is larger than the hybrids', at 460 litres, and bigger than almost anything else at this price point.

As for driving, the word that comes to mind most is fine: there's nothing to offend. The steering is very light but precise enough. The brakes are progressive and so is the throttle. Performance feels surprisingly good for the 111bhp and 92lb ft on offer, although it does tail off above 50mph.

The car is softly set up so very little jars the ride, but unsophisticated damping means it never completely settles down either. On the Bridgestone rubber supplied, there is more grip than most customers are likely to look for, and roll is kept in check.

The £21,595 Plus-trim version includes a reversing camera, cruise control and climate control and the £23,595 Max model adds heated seats, sat-nav and a wireless charger. So this is a true bargain and even cheaper than the hybrid version.

The kicker for some will be the 188-mile range (which seems achievable with a light foot; I saw over 4mpkWh during testing), but a 248-mile Extended Range model is only a couple of grand more.

At this price point, the words fine and adequate are used positively: there is very little to dislike here, which is praise in itself.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

TECH SPEC

CITROEN E-C3 AIRCROSS MAX STANDARD RANGE

Pleasant, well mannered and very good value. Recommendable if range isn't an issue

★★★★☆

Price £23,595 (after Electric Car Grant)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 111bhp
Torque 92lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1504kg
0-62mph 11.7sec
Top speed 89mph
Battery 44.2/43.7kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 188 miles, 3.6mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Fiat Grande Panda, Renault 4, Vauxhall Frontera

It is quicker to 50mph than 111bhp suggests and drives pleasantly

Ergonomics are good, it's roomy and it feels well screwed together

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR ROAD TEST 5781

CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS

C3 supermini's chunky sibling achieves a practicality first among B-SUVs

MODEL TESTED
CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS HYBRID 136 MAX
Price £26,565
Power 144bhp
Torque 170lb ft
0-60mph 9.3sec
30-70mph 8.6sec
Top speed 125mph (claimed)
Average economy 43.4mpg
Electric range na
CO_2 emissions 121g/km
70-0mph 50.0m (15deg C, wet)

Europe's modal-average, typical new car has for several years now almost certainly been a supermini-based, B-segment SUV. Given the soaring popularity of the likes of the Ford Puma, Nissan Juke, Vauxhall Mokka, Renault Captur and more, it's remarkable enough that there are any 'firsts' left to accomplish in the class. And yet Citroën is laying claim to one with the second-generation C3 Aircross.

This new, higher-riding, marginally tougher-looking, stretched version of the C3 is the first car in its segment – a pumped-up supermini segment, let's not forget – to offer seven seats. It doesn't do so as standard and yet, still, it becomes a highly unusual prospect among new cars: one to combine a footprint that's narrowly under 4.4 metres in length with three rows of seating for those who have a use for them.

The usual Tardis-like analogies are clearly invited. Seven seats in cars of comparable length, such as the Dacia Jogger, are offered elsewhere, but none among cars identified less as MPVs and more as pint-sized SUVs. Now for the Autocar road test tape measure to bear witness to how much usable space there really is in this car, and whether it's a packaging marvel, an exercise in futility – or something in between.

Like the smaller C3, it can be had as an electric ë-C3 Aircross; as a conventional turbocharged petrol; or as a 48V 'self-charging' petrol-electric hybrid. It was the last version we elected to test.

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Chunkier looks are more SUV-tough than predecessor was; fairly broad choice of powertrains
CONS Not very well differentiated from C3 sibling

The material differences between the regular C3 and this C3 Aircross are quite subtle but certainly aren't just window dressing. Just as the 2017 first-generation car was to its equivalent C3, this is apparently a very close relation – much closer, say, than a Peugeot 2008 ever has been to a 208. The cars clearly share plenty of body panels, no doubt much of their body-in-white unitary steel chassis and a lot of interior parts.

But compare them in profile and you can spot the differences easily enough. The Aircross is 380mm longer than the regular C3, with a 132mm-longer wheelbase. The rest of the growth spurt is contained within a stretched rear overhang. The longer rear doors betray that difference, as does the car's stretched C-pillar, while its more upright rear window speaks of increased boot volume. Elsewhere, however, it's mostly only bumper and styling that sets the C3 and Aircross apart, which tells you a great deal about how much SUV-typical visual attitude is contained in the regular C3.

Like its smaller relation, the C3 Aircross is based on Stellantis's new Smart Car platform that supports both battery-electric and combustion-engined derivatives. In the C3 Aircross's case, EV versions can be had with a slightly longer-range battery than the regular C3 gets (54kWh versus 44kWh), or in standard-range form. And if electric power doesn't suit, there are 99bhp 1.2-litre turbo petrol and 144bhp 1.2-litre 48V hybrid options as well: the former with a six-speed manual gearbox, the latter with a six-speed dual-clutch automatic.

All versions have driven front wheels, a strut-type front axle and a torsion beam rear. Steel coil springs are used for primary suspension, with Citroën continuing to fit hydraulic bump stops, designed to add progressive wheel control towards the limits of travel, to enable the fitment of softer springs.

Our test car weighed 1381kg on the proving ground scales with a third of a tank of fuel on board: quite a respectably light figure, given its capability and brief and at least some electrification.

The higher-riding C3 first arrived in 2017

■ Styling of the lower bumper, with its more undershot jaw, is the easiest way to tell an Aircross from a normal C3 from the front. It looks tougher, but only marginally, and many would expect more differentiation between the two.

■ Citroën returned to an oval brand logo in 2022. When you see one on a grille – in chrome, with those horizontal lines creating extra visual interest on the brightwork – you better appreciate how the firm is gesturing at its century of history.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

PROS Seven seats in a sub-4.4m car is impressive packaging; simple display concept and secondary controls work quite well
CONS Might actually be more practical as a five-seater

The C3 Aircross's practicality calling card may well be those optional third-row chairs, but customers should be careful to consider what kind of practicality they actually need before hastily adding them.

Our Hybrid 136 test car had them, and they fold flat into a space roughly the size of what might otherwise be an underfloor boot compartment. But folding them down leaves a boot of only 300 litres up to the window line, reduced from 460 litres in the case of the equivalent five-seater car – so a significant trade-off. In terms of volume, that's actually less under-shelf cargo space than most regular superminis offer (although the Aircross's boxy upper body would be likely to reverse that relationship for outright, loaded-to-the-roof capacity).

There are other compromises in the boot of the seven-seater. Citroën provides only a fairly flimsy covering for the folded third row to serve as a kind of boot floor, which clips onto the second-row seatbacks – but wouldn't stop smaller items from rolling around and beneath it into hard-to-reach areas. There are also wide steel loop fixings that the third-row seatbacks connect to when in place, which when the seats are down would reduce the boot's maximum loading width to less than 900mm. When all seven seats are in place, almost no boot space is left. Citroën claims 40 litres, but it's really only enough to store that flimsy boot floor covering.

How usable is what you're getting in return: the third row of seats? To be fair to Citroën, the seats themselves offer no less space than many typical smaller seven-seaters – enough for smaller children on booster seats (typically for these cars, there are no Isofix points for row three), but not really for those of secondary school age. Anyone back there has only limited foot space – but there are proper cupholders and a USB-C wired charging port.

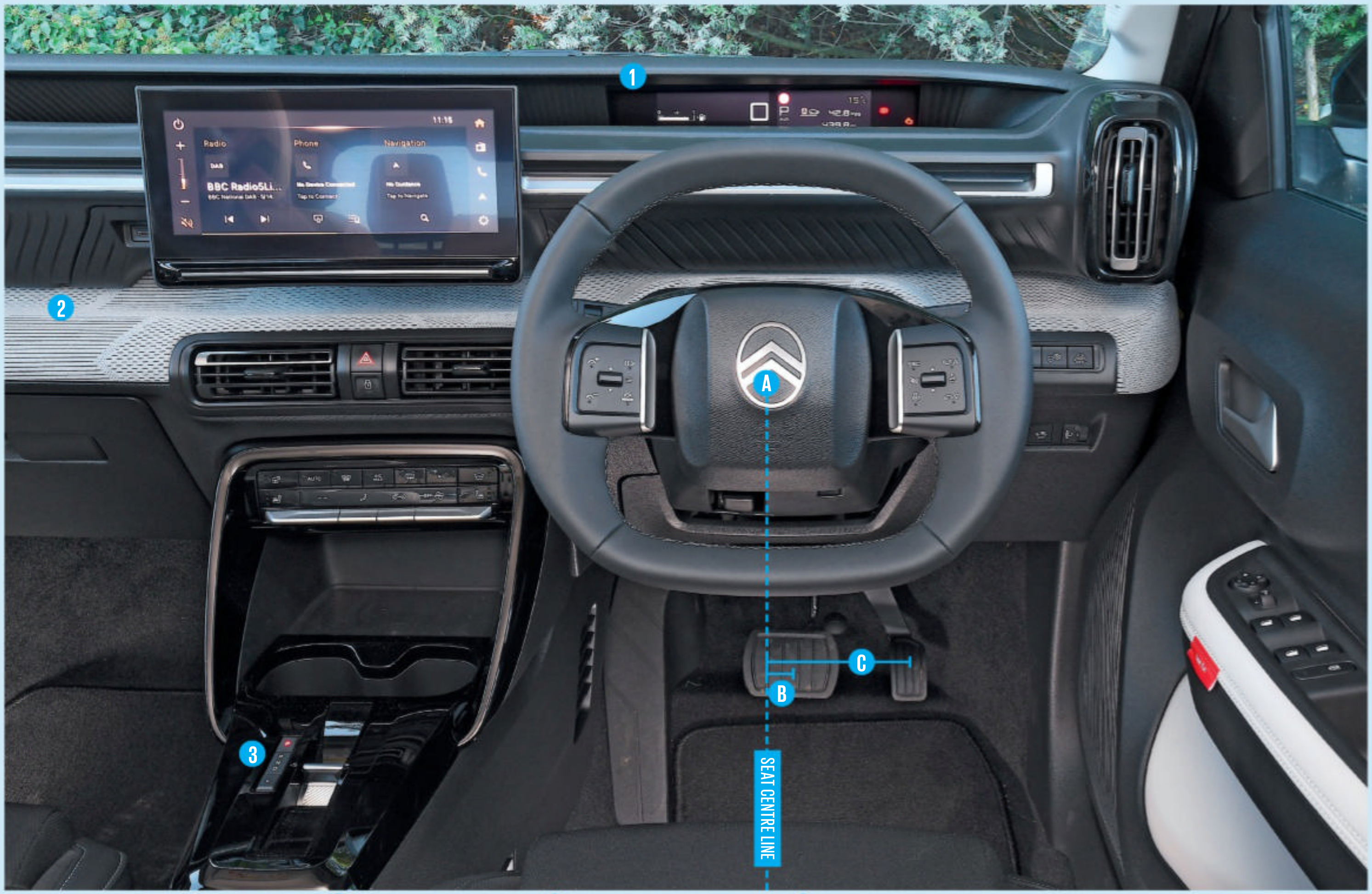
Row two is roughly class-typical (the Dacia Duster and Renault 4 offer slightly less leg room but more head room), but the five-seat ▸

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

① Digital instruments are billed as a pseudo-head-up display. It is a bit too small to carry all the info you would like all at once but couldn't get much nearer your natural line of sight.

② Cloth dashboard trim is one of few classier material touches and easy to like. Projectors hidden below the outer air vents display lighting effects on it after dark.

③ Slightly fiddly drive selector tends to need two 'nudges' across the gate to get you from 'D', though 'N', to 'R', and vice versa, which makes three-point turns a hassle at first.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 20mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 150mm right. Footwell feels slightly narrow and shallow, but not problematically so. Steering has rake, and limited reach, adjustment range.

◂ Aircross's second-row chairs are mounted 65mm farther to the rear (there are no sliding seats here, except in the front), meaning more leg room, and they also recline, improving head room. This car is therefore ready to cater to those who want a spacious five-seater with a bigger boot, or a less-spacious-feeling seven-seater with a smaller boot. Even in the seven-seater, the most commonly used passenger seats should feel adequately roomy for average-sized adults.

Behind the wheel, you're greeted by the same upwards-projected, head-up-display-style digital instruments as the regular C3 uses. It's a touch sparse for useful information – there's no rev counter at all – but very readable. Although the layout of secondary controls is likewise simplified, Citroën takes care to include physical blower controls (which we like), as well as physical buttons for the deactivation of the car's key advanced driver assistance systems (speeding warning buzzer, lane keeping assistance).

The car's 10.3in infotainment system is quite a basic one (wider adjustment of what ADAS features the Aircross has is done through the steering wheel controls and trip computer), but it's not overburdened with functions to manage. It is easy to navigate and includes wireless smartphone mirroring, which is what you are likely to use most of the time.

The car's driving position, meanwhile, feels only slightly raised, but offers good visibility. The front seats are a little bit flat and lacking in lateral support, but are fairly softly padded.

Where material quality is concerned, the cabin is made mostly of hard mouldings that don't appeal much to the touch but aren't shiny and don't mark easily either, so aren't especially offensive. Textile trims are used in a few places to add a richer note, and fairly effectively.

PERFORMANCE

★★★½☆

PROS Respectable pace and easy drivability; no 'rubber-band' effect

CONS Very limited engine-off running; hybrid system doesn't seem to add much accessible torque

Citroën's 48V petrol-electric powertrain made our Hybrid 136 test car the fastest-accelerating C3 Aircross you can buy. Even so, the car doesn't feel particularly enthused by the prospect of getting a hurry on, which tells you a lot about the appealingly laid-back dynamic priorities of the Citroën brand in 2025.

Objectively, it's at least passably assertive, without feeling brisk. Needing 9.3sec to hit 60mph from rest on a wet test day, and 9.9sec to get to 62mph, it was actually slightly quicker than Citroën's 10.1sec claim and slightly quicker, too, than the Dacia Duster Hybrid 140 we tested in 2024, although it was marginally slower than the Toyota Yaris Hybrid we timed back in 2020.

Under full power, a combination of the three-cylinder turbo engine and electric drive motor allows the car to tackle motorway slip roads and single-carriageway overtakes at least fairly keenly, but there isn't much of a sense of readily accessible electrified torque here, or any particular potency held in reserve. The electric motor feels quite meek, so that making the car run in engine-off condition, though possible in town and heavy traffic, requires quite a lot of restraint with your big toe, and the engine revs busily and works hard when you make greater demands. The net impression is of a powertrain that works respectably well but is seldom as assured or effortless as would best serve Citroën's character type, and is seldom quite as efficient as you might expect it to be, either (see 'Buying & Owning', right).

The car offers normal 'D' and 'L' modes for the transmission – 'L' increasing trailing-throttle engine braking (motor regen, in the Hybrid 136's case), but not by a great deal as far as we could tell.

Since the hybrid system is a P2-style configuration with the motor upstream of the gearbox, regen tends to ebb and flow a little with every downshift, and feels a bit uneven as a result, although that doesn't really amount to a drivability issue. There is no way to select gears manually when the engine is running; this is very much a powertrain to leave to its own devices, intended for those who wouldn't take an interest in what it was doing at any particular moment. And it works – perhaps not especially well, but certainly well enough.

RIDE & HANDLING

★★★⯪☆

PROS Gentle ride works well on smoother surfaces; doesn't run into major body control problems
CONS Ride isolation feels a bit clunky and hollow over rougher roads

Citroën's particular approach to the chassis tuning of its modern models, with their Advanced Comfort Suspension (read hydraulic bump stops), has produced slightly mixed results of late as regards suitability for UK roads. It does so again in the case of the C3 Aircross.

This is certainly a comfortable-riding car for a significant proportion of the time, and deals with well-surfaced urban and extra-urban roads quite well, even if it's a bit of a fallacy to suggest, as Citroën does, that it's much like a 'magic carpet' on gnarlier roads, when push really comes to shove.

The car has lightly weighted, fairly slow-geared steering; a fairly high, though ultimately controlled, rate of roll as it corners; a modest, though not precarious, mechanical grip level; and a medium-soft gait to its ride that makes it supple over longer-wave inputs.

On a road that suits it, it bobs along very comfortably and agreeably. It's also the kind of car you can manoeuvre around car parks and junctions with barely more than a fingertip's grasp on the steering wheel, which contributes quite a lot to how easy it feels to drive at low speeds.

At higher speeds, however, that lightness in the steering begins to make the car's handling feel quite flighty and over-assisted as you turn in to a corner, eroding your confidence in it slightly.

Citroën's gently sprung suspension, meanwhile, doesn't exactly fail to keep control of the car's body, although damping of bigger inputs can feel a bit ineffective. But it certainly struggles with ride isolation and wheel control. There's a hollowness about the C3 Aircross's secondary ride, over ridges and drains, that could lead you to expect that the car uses bigger alloy wheels and skinnier tyre sidewalls than it actually does. That, in turn, suggests Citroën's clever bump stops don't work as well on this low-cost Smart Car platform as they might elsewhere, and that there's more tuning work to do if the firm wants to deliver a distinctive sort of ride comfort on cars that use it.

ASSISTED DRIVING

★★★☆☆

PROS Not intrusive; physical buttons for deactivation
CONS Speed limit recognition can misread posted limits and impose phoney warnings

All versions of the C3 Aircross come with lane departure warning, autonomous emergency braking, driver monitoring and speed limit 'recognition and recommendation' systems as standard. None gets adaptive or intelligent cruise control, just the manual kind.

The car's AEB and driver monitoring systems seemed well tuned and not overly sensitive. But, while there are physical buttons to deactivate the lane keeping and speed limit monitoring systems (which we appreciate), the latter irked us when left on. It clearly hadn't been properly converted for the UK market, so would recognise a posted 50mph limit as it if were 50kph, and then start beeping at 31mph.

This was only a software glitch, and may well have been a quirk of the early demo car we tested, so might not affect customer cars subject to a proper UK-market inspection before handover. But that is, of course, impossible to be sure about – and was predictably annoying.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS Low prices of ICE and BEV models
CONS Hybrid looks relatively pricey; real-world economy is okay, but not exceptional

There's plenty of value for money where the C3 Aircross's pricing is concerned. Buyers motivated by that will perhaps only pause to wonder which version of the car would suit them best, and whether they really need to spend more than they otherwise might.

Though it's still beaten by a Dacia Jogger on bargain seven-seat showroom price, the C3 Aircross is cheaper than the majority of its B-SUV competitors, and especially so if you stick with the cheaper engines and entry-grade trim level. The caveat here is that, if you want the seven-seat version, you have to start with Max trim, which is just another reason to be certain that you really need those extra seats, and are happy with all the compromises they bring.

As far as powertrain choice goes, the Hybrid 136 model looks like the outlier on price now that government incentives have made the ë-C3 Aircross that much more tempting. But even the hybrid costs almost £1000 less than the equivalent Toyota Yaris Cross, and after Toyota's latest retail discounts at that.

Fuel economy for our Hybrid 136 test car proved quietly impressive around town ('everyday' test: 54.3mpg) but a little disappointing out of town (touring test: 41.5mpg). On both, it bettered the results of a Dacia Duster Hybrid 140, but we expect slightly better of a car of this size optimised for efficiency in 2025. ▶

FRONT Leg room 1040mm, head room 990mm. Front-row passenger space is good; the seats are a little flat and short in the backrest but comfortable.

2ND ROW Head room 960mm, leg room 660mm. No sliding adjustment here. Passenger space is average but would be better in the five-seater.

3RD ROW Head room 840mm, leg room 650mm. High floor and limited head room make the third row only really suitable for smaller children. They get cupholders and a USB charging port, though.

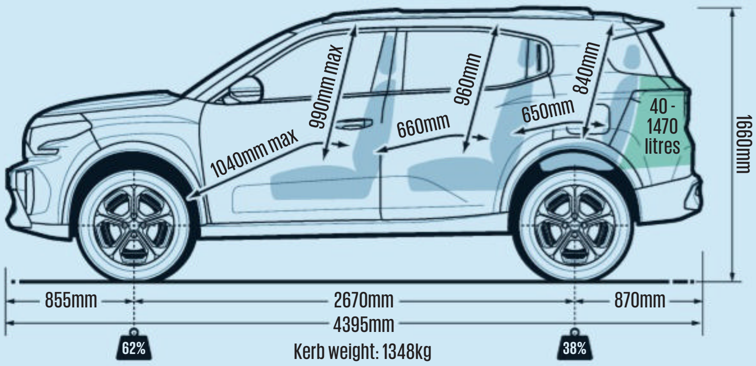
BOOT Length 840-1650mm, width 875-1190mm, height 720mm. Seven-seater has an odd clip-on, raised boot floor when the third row is folded. Volume is only 300 litres and negligible when all the seats are up.

> "It certainly struggles with ride isolation and wheel control"

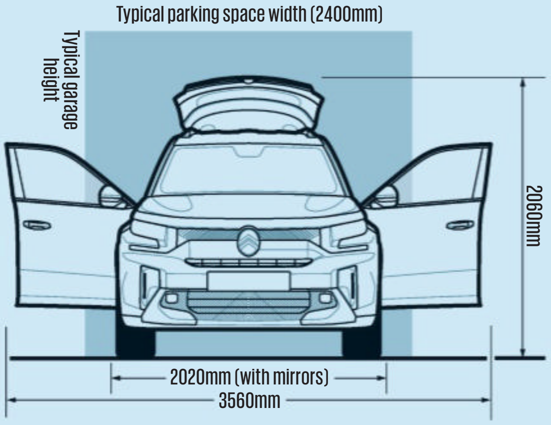
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4395mm **Width** 2020mm/1850mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1660mm **Door span** 3560mm **Max height to open bootlid** 2060mm

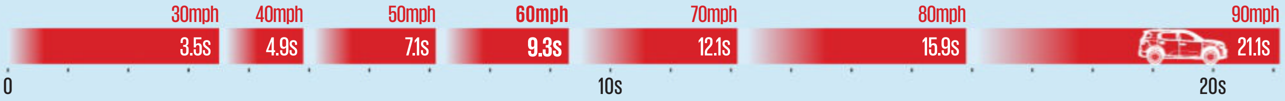

990mm max
960mm
840mm
1040mm max
660mm
650mm
40 - 1470 litres
1660mm
855mm
2670mm
870mm
4395mm
62%
38%
Kerb weight: 1348kg

PARKING

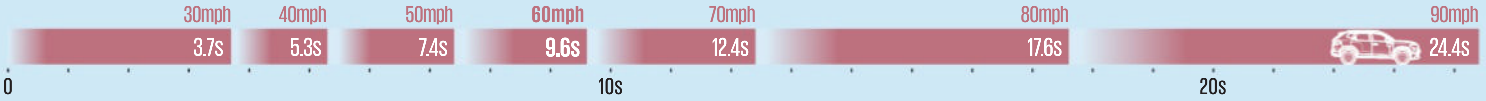

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2060mm
2020mm (with mirrors)
3560mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 15deg C, wet
Standing quarter mile 17.2sec at 83.0mph **Standing km** 31.5sec at 101.7mph **30-70mph** 8.6sec **30-70mph in fourth** na **0-62mph** 9.9sec

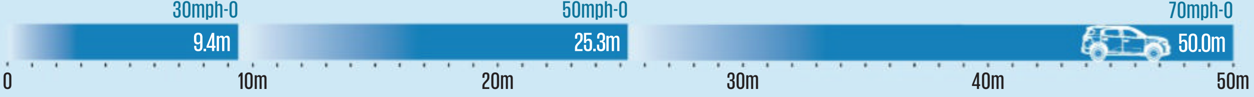


Dacia Duster Hybrid 140 Journey (2024, 9deg C, damp/drying)
Standing quarter mile 17.6sec at 79.9mph **Standing km** 32.5sec at 96.0mph **30-70mph** 8.7sec **30-70mph in fourth** na

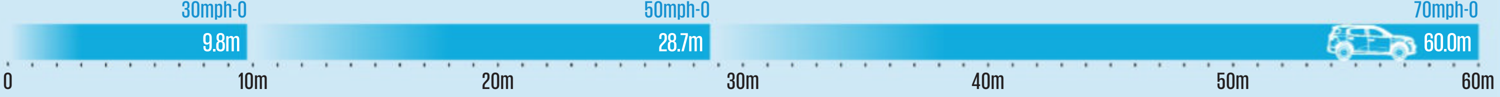


BRAKING

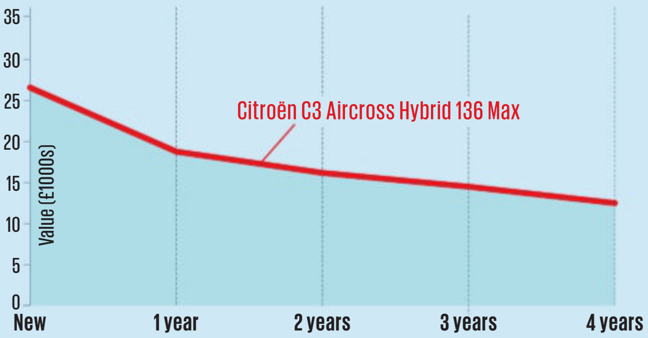
Dry 60-0mph 2.77sec (rain)



Wet 60-0mph 3.05sec

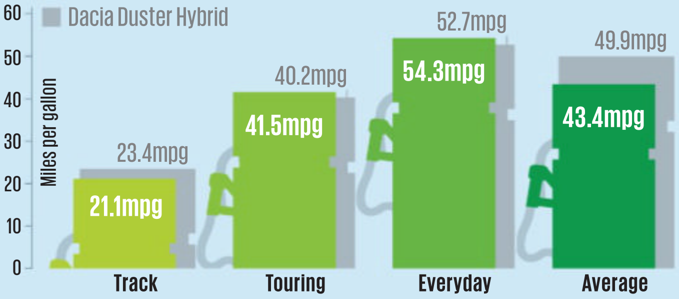


DEPRECIATION

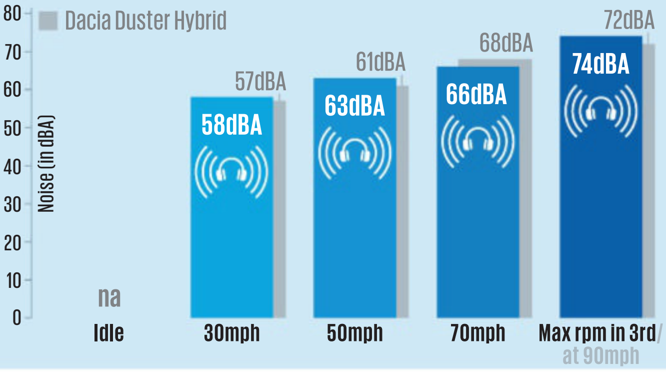


RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 47.3-57.4mpg (combined) **Test range** 420/402/526 miles (average/touring/everyday) **Electric test range** na

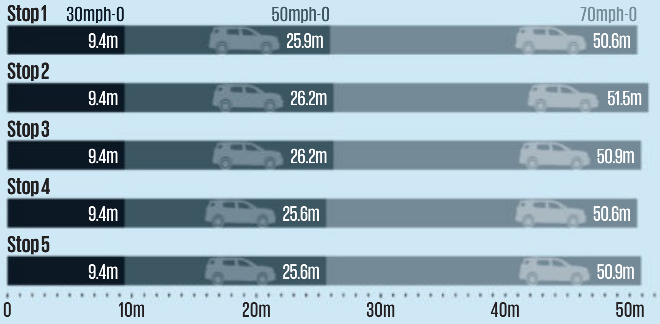


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: 0.3m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS HYBRID 136 MAX

On-the-road price £26,565
Price as tested £27,330
Value after 3yrs/36k miles £14,481
Contract hire £290 pcm (£1740 deposit + 36 months/30,000 miles)
Typical PCP £230 pcm (£5313 deposit + 24 months/16,000 miles)
Insurance group 24E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard Manual cruise control/speed limiter, automatic LED headlights with manual level adjustment, front/side/front and rear curtain airbags, 17in alloy wheels, bi-tone roof, heated steering wheel, front and rear parking sensors, 10.3in touchscreen infotainment with wireless smartphone mirroring
Optional Third-row seats £765
Also available Metallic paint £645/£770, roof in white/body colour £0, spare-wheel preparation £20 (five-seat only)

HYBRID POWERTRAIN

Engine Front, transverse, FWD
Type 3 cyls in line, 1199cc, turbocharged, petrol
Motor Permanent magnet synchronous motor, gearbox-mounted; 21bhp, 38lb ft
Battery type NMC
Capacity 0.9kWh (total)
Voltage 48V
Total power 144bhp
Total torque 170lb ft
Power to weight 107bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 126lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 6-spd dual-clutch automatic

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel unitary chassis
Weight/as tested 1348kg/1381kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 62%/38%
Drag coefficient na
Wheels 6.5Jx17in **Tyres** 215/60 R17 96H, Bridgestone Turanza 6 Enliten
Spare None (mobility foam)
Fuel tank 44 litres (under rear seats, filler on nearside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, hydraulic bump stops, anti-roll bar **Rear** Torsion beam, coil springs, hydraulic bump stops
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.9 turns lock to lock; 10.9m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 302mm ventilated discs, single-piston calipers
Rear 268mm solid discs, single-piston calipers
Handbrake type Electronic, switch on centre console

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO_2 121g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £133/£266

VERDICT

Keen price and clever packaging, but order with care

★★★⯪☆

While clever enough to admit seven people, and likeable for its alternative character traits, the Citroën C3 Aircross isn't quite as versatile as you would imagine. It could handle a larger, young family, or a smaller, older one. But it couldn't switch from one role to the other quite as casually as perhaps it should, so ordering the version you really need is key.

As a higher-end hybrid seven-seater, the car has adequate performance and easy drivability, although it leaves a little to be desired in terms of refinement and real-world touring efficiency. We would stick with a five-seat, entry-level petrol model to snag this car at its voluminous, value-packed, simplicity-centred best, and credit Citroën for its boldness of spirit a little more than its particular execution.

TESTERS' NOTES

MATT SAUNDERS
The storage cubbies are hard and unlined, so your keys would rattle and slide around almost wherever you stowed them. Praise be for the increasingly rare ignition slot.

ILLYA VERPRAET
If Dacia can manage removable second-row seats on the Jogger, couldn't Citroën have put a removable third row in this car? Put them in when you need them; leave them in the garage, and use the bigger boot, when you don't.

FACELIFT FIXES

- Investigate sliding second-row seats to bridge the gap between five- and seven-seat models.
- Expand the capabilities of that 48V hybrid system for more electric-only running.
- Make the secondary ride true to Citroën's comfort-first USP.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	
		CITROEN C3 AIRCROSS HYBRID 136 MAX				
	DACIA JOGGER HYBRID 140 EXTREME The hybrid wouldn't be our choice, but the rest of the package is brilliant. Great value.		**CITROEN BERLINGO XL DIESEL 130 AUTO** Passenger version back by (niche) popular demand. LWB isn't small but is very useful.	**SKODA KAMIQ 1.0 TSI 116 DSG DESIGN** No seven-seater, and the five-seater lacks some practicality smarts in this company. Pleasant.	**FORD TOURNEO COURIER 1.0T AUTO** Oddly expensive, and there's no seven-seater. Boxy looks and keen engine appeal.	**VAUXHALL FRONTERA HYBRID 145 GS** UK drive soon. Aircross's cousin offers more choice of engines and trims.
	★★★★☆		★★★⯪☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★☆☆	
Price	£24,305		£28,015	£28,975	£29,520	£28,765
Power, torque	141bhp, 109lb ft		129bhp, 221lb ft	114bhp, 148lb ft	123bhp, 148lb ft	144bhp, 170lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	10.0sec, 108mph		11.7sec, 115mph	10.2sec, 124mph	11.1sec, 109mph	8.7sec, 118mph
CO_2, economy	109g/km, 57.6mpg		150g/km, 48.7mpg	128g/km, 49.9mpg	156g/km, 40.9mpg	119g/km, 53.3mpg

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

Cosmetic add-ons give a car a personal touch that road testers are denied

Do people still put eyelashes on their cars? It's been a while since I've been in the accessories aisle to check.

The latest thing seems to be those cat stickers put in rear windows that make the rear wiper look like a little tail (what a shame that the artist formerly known as the Ora Funky Cat doesn't have a rear wiper). I saw a Volkswagen T4 Transporter van the other day, the back of which looked like a mobile anthology of every bumper sticker yet made. You could barely see that it was a Transporter underneath them all.

"But this," thought I, as I made my way down the A34 the other day, "is the stick-on car mod to rule them all." There it was: a 10-year-old black Seat Ibiza estate and otherwise entirely unremarkable – except that it had devil's horns. Not those little chrome ones that sometimes get stuck around makers' badges, with the little forked tail underneath (cringe). No, actual 'life-size' plastic ones, plonked high on the roof. It was probably risking eternal damnation just thinking it, and I never imagined I would, but crikey, I miss fluffy dice.

And then I thought: who actually has the stranger relationship with their car in this little clash of automotive cultures? Satan the Seat driver? Or me?

I would say the Seat owner in question was in her mid-twenties, and she looked very pleased with how much attention her modification was attracting. Perhaps she hadn't long grown them. They made for an unusually bold impression, but lots of people like to personalise their cars, so why would a road tester like me be so offended and repelled on seeing evidence that they do?

> **"Most people just decide whether they like a car or not"**

It's perhaps the brazen outward evidence of attachment, of forging a personal relationship with a car. Of 'imprinting' upon one, if you like. That's anathema to us.

I've never known a road tester put eyelashes on a car. Plenty I know keep several cars of their own, but they don't give them names, never mind quasi-anthropomorphic cosmetic enhancements. They tend to keep them studiously 'stock' – or close to it – and often don't keep cars all that long. Just like the test cars on their drive, their own cars tend to come and go.

It's a habit. Distance and detachment are pretty vital when you're reviewing cars – or reviewing anything for that matter – and you want to be studiously fair. You have to check your own impressions and be aware of your personal preferences; you depend on a neutral, objective attitude and a constant, repeatable approach. The same test routes help, broadly the same order of addressing functions and systems, and the same amount of time and effort invested in doing so. Everything has to get the same chance, every time, and marking it down just because 'you don't like it' isn't good enough.

You can't help it when you feel more predisposed to one car than the last, of course. Nor when one just seems to cater to your own expectations or tastes. You're human. But you have to be aware that you're just one particular human – one driver – and that what suits or pleases you won't necessarily please everyone. Every review has to make at least some room for a reader who doesn't share your own point of view.

It isn't normal to have to treat cars like this, to have to think so much about what they're like, what they're doing, why they might be doing it and who they're doing it for. Most people get to just decide whether they like a car or not, and they don't have to rationalise why. After that, I suppose anything goes.

For many, a car is the ultimate extension of self; to us, it has to be kept 'other'. For me – and just for the record – it wasn't always thus. My life before road testing may not have included automotive fancy dress, but it did feature a Triumph Acclaim with 'The Silver Bullet' written down its sides in stick-on vinyl. How cringe.

X3 SAV
RV25 ZXL

The best Macan can get?

Previous Macan Electrics have failed to hit the spot. **MATT SAUNDERS** finds out how the new 4S fares against ICE-powered rivals from Audi and BMW

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

KY25 EHU

The 'profit warning' is a counterintuitive concept in the modern corporate world. Seems a bit like the idea of a well-signed, buried treasure-related trip hazard, or the threat of sudden and unexpected happiness. But it means the opposite of all that: and, as we now know, even the most 'bankable' of automotive brands can be vulnerable to one.

Few brands in the automotive industry have flexed quite as much profit-making power since the turn of the 21st century as Porsche. The choppier waters it has hit of late have been attributed to the decline of the Chinese market and the impact of North American tariffs. And it has all been reported – rather a lot – because the idea of a Porsche that isn't making lorry loads of cash is clearly a tough concept for the market to wrap its head around.

But let's put these 'troubled times' into proper perspective. In 2022, Porsche hit the stock market, and it was a move that made its cash-generating capacities a matter of public concern. And since then the brand has made – wait for it – €14 billion for its shareholders.

So what has caused all the teeth-gnashing and hand-wringing among the financial press? The 'problem', such as it is, is that the company might only manage to make a paltry €1 billion in 2025.

Violins at the ready, then. In 2024 – the year in which the Porsche Macan Electric was launched – Porsche declared roughly 40% more profit than JLR (although these figures are accounted for over different time periods in the UK than in Europe, so that's not an exact comparison) and more than twice as much money as Ferrari.

Perhaps most importantly of all, the sales performance of Zuffenhausen's newest all-electric product now seems to be picking up. The Macan was the most popular of all of Porsche's models in the first half of this year, when ICE and electric model sales are combined. Sales of the electric version exceeded those of the petrol-fuelled version – as well as those of the 911 sports car. Not bad going, then, and quite contrary to what you might have heard.

But here's the thing. The Macan Electric has given us road testers some mixed messages since it first arrived in the UK. When we road

"Park the Macan alongside the X3 and SQ5 Sportback, and you'll see three quite different offerings"

Audi retains a hint of luxury but lacks the richness of old

X3 cabin is roomiest, but the design is a bit OTT in places

The Macan's elegant interior has the 'high-quality' brief nailed

Unsettled Macan fidgets as it tries to contain its mass

Audi is agile and manages to keep its driver engaged

BMW has great body control and a feel of connection

SQ5's composure blunts its outright sporting edge

tested the Turbo Electric back in February, we expressed significant reservations about its busy, stiff-legged ride and at times unintuitive handling. Later, our full test of the single-motor Macan Electric recorded much more positive impressions, along with compliments for a car with more of the dynamic roundedness you would expect of a premium sporting SUV.

So what about the mid-range, dual-motor, potential sweet spot: the Macan 4S Electric? Is it more like a single-motor car with superpowers, or is it more akin to a Turbo, with similar ride and handling shortcomings? And, leaving all the benefit-in-kind and carbon emissions baggage to one side, does it stand up as a £77,000 everyday-use Porsche when you bring a couple of more traditionally powered alternatives – say, a BMW X3 M50 xDrive and an Audi SQ5 Sportback – along for comparison?

END OF AN ERA, NEW BEGINNING

There's less than a year to go until Porsche ceases production of the petrol-powered Macan. And now that we know that the car's indirect ICE-powered replacement will have an all-new model identity, we also know that the future for the Macan is all-electric. And we're looking at it.

The good news is that it's still small. I have always liked that about this car. Even when the Macan first appeared in 2014, it was little for its class – and that told you, loud and clear, what this car's dynamic priorities were. It had lots and lots of imitators, but none more vividly demonstrated what could be gained by a more svelte and athletic SUV. All you had to do was drive one.

Now, as then, you only get hatchback-class passenger space in the rear of this car. Park the Macan Electric alongside a BMW X3 M50 xDrive and an Audi SQ5 Sportback, and you'll see three quite different practicality offerings. The Porsche is for an owner who knows he or she is ▸

“The Macan 4S Electric feels a lot quicker than either the BMW or Audi”

◂ unlikely to carry adult passengers in the back very often or over any significant distance and perhaps only needs the space for younger children. The BMW, meanwhile, is for someone who expects quite different.

The Audi sits somewhere in between. As a 6ft 3in adult, I can sit happily enough in the back of the SQ5 Sportback without feeling as pinched and squeezed as I do in the Porsche, but the sense of space isn’t as generous as it is in the BMW. Meanwhile, if carrying bulky loads is something you do on a regular basis, the X3’s much taller, squarer boot will be a lot more useful. Audi does, of course, make a regular, non-Sportback SQ5 should you need that bit more carrying space, so things aren’t exactly cut and dried here.

The cars provide quite differently for their drivers. If you want something higher-riding but which still feels couched and a bit sports car-like, the Macan ticks the box better than either rival. You don’t lower yourself down into it, yet, given the straight-legged driving position and the height of the car’s beltline around you, you feel almost as if you must have.

The X3’s driving position feels broadly similar: quite straight-legged, with a high-sprouting steering column, so you could almost be in some ‘all-road’ saloon or estate. In contrast, the Audi is higher of hip point and lower of column, so more ‘sit up and beg’ and, to be honest, more ordinary.

We would all like our £75,000 sporting SUV to come with a touch of quality, wouldn’t we? Well, if the BMW is topping the order for space and practicality, it’s the Porsche that hits back on tactile quality. There’s a true sense of maturity, elegance and understatement about the Macan Electric’s cabin and, in truth, neither the BMW nor the Audi has an answer to it.

The Macan’s control layout is similar to that of a Taycan, although not quite identical. The primary controls match up, from the overly diddly, fascia-mounted drive selector to the rotary drive mode selector inboard of the steering wheel rim.

It’s a familiar refrain, but the absence of regeneration paddles on the steering wheel is a curious omission. Simply put, electric cars need to take every avenue available that leads towards greater driver engagement and give you more than just two pedals and a steering rim as seams of interaction and control. For those EVs with a sporting agenda, surely that goes double.

Also, I miss the Taycan’s second driver-configurable ‘diamond’ button on the edge of the instrument screen. While the pseudo-saloon gives you two of these within easy reach, each of which you can use to toggle battery regen on and off, deactivate a particular ADAS function or achieve a number of other genuinely useful things, the Macan gives only one.

For the overall refinement of its design, though, and for its convincing tactile quality, the Porsche’s interior beats the Audi’s and BMW’s by a clear margin. Inside, the X3 is like a Denis Villeneuve movie, with its neon-illuminated decorative features and science-fiction shapes. If you like that progressive sort of streak in your everyday-use SUV, then fair enough. I think it might get a bit much in a daily driver, but even if it’s for you, parts of it – conspicuously plasticky interior door handles, for instance – will still look and feel cheap to you, I’d be willing to bet.

The Audi, meanwhile, is aiming for Ingolstadt’s familiar old touch, with luxury materials and restrained design, while mixing in so much domineering touchscreen technology

BMW’s tall boot is the best at taking big, bulky loads

Sportback’s shape compromises the overall boot space

Macan’s compact size means its boot is the smallest

and not really convincing at the task. It has too much material gloss and razzle-dazzle and not enough genuine richness or tactile heft about it. It's got a comfier seat and a more grown-up feel than the BMW, sure, but this is certainly not an Audi interior for the ages.

POWER STRUGGLES

If this were the petrol-powered Macan, this is the bit where it would disappear for the hills with all of the credit. Few cars that I can bring to mind have enjoyed such a clear sense of dynamic superiority over their rivals as that one.

The Macan Electric is clearly intended to pick up the thread but, even here in dual-motor 4S form, the driving experience just doesn't come together in the same way. It somehow doesn't seem as convincing or amount to as much. In this electric guise, the Macan has as many conspicuous failings as apparent strengths.

You can't ignore what it's good at. The 4S Electric feels a lot quicker than either the BMW or Audi, even if the 0-62mph performance claim puts its advantage at only about half a second – because, well, electric motors. You can catapult it away from rest, flicking its torque on like a switch and making it respond and forge onwards so much more instantly. And that makes it exciting, in a sort of physical, 'net effect of outright force on your senses' type of way. It is also supremely linear in just about any of the ways that it responds to your right foot.

But it's notably less engaging than either the Audi or the BMW, which have power deliveries that build to a climax as their engines rev. That's true even with the Macan's imitation engine noise switched on. Regen paddles might help bridge that gap, but I don't think they would close it. ▸

The Audi is refined and settled, but the taut X3 is a better driver's car

Saloon vs SUV: "Wouldn't a 3 Series be better?"

It's a perennial question with SUVs, particularly the performance variety: why not just buy the equivalent saloon or estate? It's especially pertinent for the BMW X3, given that it's the tall version of the much-celebrated 3 Series.

There just happened to be an M340i floating around the Autocar offices the day we did this triple test, and since it's about as like-for-like a comparison with the X3 M50 as it gets, we had to bring it along.

First of all, you don't give up any rear leg room by going for the 3 Series, but even if you choose the Touring, the SUV does have more luggage space: 570 litres trumps the estate's 500. Space and versatility are big adverts for an SUV, of course. If you need either, clearly a 3 Series isn't going to fit your bill.

When it comes to driving, though, there's no contest: the M340i rides big bumps with even more ease than the X3 M50, and it feels more poised through corners. And you can't cheat physics: on a motorway run, the M340i will average just north of 40mpg, while the taller X3 stands just south of that. The SUV counters that with a bigger fuel tank, mind.

There are other slight differences that aren't necessarily a result of SUV-ness. The X3's gearbox is great in isolation, but by comparison the M340i's is tuned to feel slightly smoother and more relaxed. The 3 Series is also a generation behind on infotainment. But while it's not as good as the same car from four years ago was, at least the buttons are greater in number and better in feel than those in the X3.

The clincher? An M340i Touring is £7000 cheaper than an X3 M50. People have valid reasons to pick SUVs, but if you're not sure that you need the space and you like driving, there should be no contest. **IV**

M340i offers a purer driving experience than the X3 M50

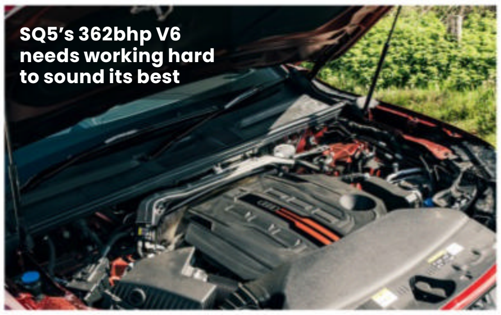
X3 SAV
YD25 KSS

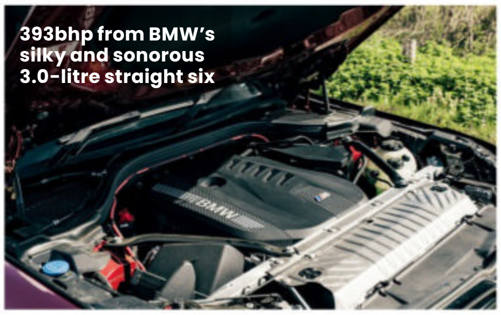
The Audi feels like the slowest car here, and its turbo V6 isn't quite as forthcoming as the BMW's straight six. It prefers to aim for refinement and isolation, only really raising its voice at high crank speeds – although that change in character does make you willing to extend it from time to time. The BMW's engine, however, is the standout. It is torquey and responsive at accessible revs and very willing to work to the higher ranges, with plenty of outright potency and a slightly digitally enhanced but still genuine-sounding combustive charm and presence. It's clearly a little bit special.

From a performance perspective, this is 'point and shoot' rather than 'plan, invest, unleash and enjoy'. We have read it all before, but that doesn't make it any less true. Even so, I would still have given the Macan a very good chance of shading the BMW and Audi as a driver's car in an aggregated sense – if only its ride and handling were as good as those of its predecessor. But, for various reasons, they just aren't.

The Macan does feel smaller and narrower on the road than its rivals, which is a promising start. It steers well enough, although the more fluent, communicative wheel of the X3 shows how much genuine feedback the Macan is missing. There's an agility, balance and poise about what the Porsche does through tighter bends that feels like its dynamic calling card, and it belies the usual inertia that typically characterises an SUV.

But this calling card also costs the car a fair bit, primarily by way of ride comfort. The Macan 4S Electric rides as if its anti-roll bars were the thickness of scaffolding poles (and, unlike on the bigger Cayenne, PDCC active anti-roll bars aren't offered). So much lateral stiffness in the axles causes the body to fidget restlessly from side to side and the ride to decline to settle on a testing country road. There's also a slight coarseness apparent in the secondary ride, and our test car's 22in alloy wheels conducted a lot of surface


SQ5's 362bhp V6 needs working hard to sound its best


393bhp from BMW's silky and sonorous 3.0-litre straight six

Macan charges at 270kW; two motors combine for 510bhp

3RD **Slightly prosaic in design and restrained in character compared with these opponents. Lacking a little in trad Audi cabin appeal, too.**

noise into the cabin, apparently via the stiff axle bushings and tyre sidewalls needed to make a 2.3-tonne car turn in so keenly.

You can't really miss noticing any of this when there are dynamically talented rivals at hand. The Audi is a refinement specialist compared with the Porsche: it's settled, isolated and pleasant, and while it doesn't seek to approach the Macan's outright agility, there's just enough composure and cutting edge to the way it goes around a bend to keep you interested in what it's doing – and what you're doing while operating it.

The X3 is better still, though. It is tauter-feeling and better connected to the road surface in its body control than either opponent, but it is still more fluent and better settled than the Porsche over lumps and lumps. The BMW manages to convey that unmistakable sports saloon dynamic character. And while it feels like the Porsche's dynamic conjuring tricks, produced in part by its four-wheel steering and active air suspension systems, can become opaque if you drive the car hard enough, the X3's sporting appeal manifests with less apparent sleight of hand. There's more robustness and integrity to the way it goes down the road.

All that said, there isn't a sporting SUV here as unambiguously superior as the old petrol-powered Macan once was. As it is, the Audi finishes third. Pleasant and easy to live with as it undoubtedly is, it falls behind by being too grown up and failing to commit hard enough to either sporting or traditional Audi priorities. The Porsche beats it for cabin quality and interior design refinement and by doing some things exceptionally well on the road while performing conspicuously poorly at others.

But our winner is the BMW X3 M50 xDrive – even though its Blade Runner exterior design and cabin styling are both quite divisive. That aside, those who want a bit of soul, pace and athleticism along with space, versatility and refinement from their mid-sized premium-brand SUV should now look to Munich, and not Stuttgart, to best meet their requirements.

Should that amount to another Porsche profit warning? We would hope not – although it's about as close as Autocar is likely to get. **A**

	BMW X3 M50 xDRIVE	PORSCHE MACAN 4S ELECTRIC	AUDI SQ5 SPORTBACK
Rating	★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★⯪☆
Price	£71,005	£76,900	£78,025
Engine	6 cyls in line, 2998cc, turbocharged, petrol	Two permanent magnet synchronous motors	V6, 2995cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power	393bhp at 5200-6250rpm	510bhp (launch control)	362bhp at 5500-6300rpm
Torque	428lb ft at 1900-4800rpm	605lb ft	406lb ft at 1700-4000rpm
Gearbox	8-spd automatic, 4WD	1-spd reduction gear, 4WD	7-spd dual-clutch auto, 4WD
Kerb weight	1980kg	2345kg	2040kg
0-62mph	4.6sec	4.1sec	4.5sec
Top speed	155mph	149mph	155mph
Fuel tank	65 litres	na	65 litres
Battery	na	100/95kWh (total/usable)	na
Range	na	337 miles	na
Economy	36.2mpg	3.2mpkWh	33.6mpg
CO_2, tax band	177g/km, 37%	0g/km, 3%	190g/km, 37%

1ST A bit bright and garish in places but, to drive and enjoy driving, it delivers almost across the board. Lots of SUV practicality, too.

2ND Lots of apparent class in its design and interior, and plenty of appeal about its SUV-coupé positioning, but a slightly mixed bag on the road.

Action stations

What are EV charging sites really like? Clean, reliable and easy to use or simply a nightmare? **JOHN EVANS** visits stations from 10 providers to see

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

There are more than 17,000 rapid and ultra-rapid EV chargers in the UK, across more than 6500 locations. Capable of delivering up to 400kW of power, they're key to the uptake of electric cars, but what are they like to use? To find out, I visited 10 charging stations – a mix of large 'hubs' near major routes and one or two smaller ones, whose operators tend to favour more local sites. I wanted to know how easy the chargers were to use, how suitable the locations were, how easy they were to find – and what state the toilets were in. There were surprises and disappointments…

INSTAVOLT

Test location Stroud Park, Banbury, Oxfordshire
Charging speed 160kW **Cost** 87p/kWh

Instavolt's special summer tariff of 54p/kWh (50p for subscribers) was available at 10 locations but unfortunately not this one. Still, that felt immaterial when my selected charger wouldn't recognise my credit or debit cards. A fellow user suggested I do a chip and PIN purchase to 'reset' one of them. At the nearby Costa, I bought some water with the credit card and was back in business. My Kia EV9 was at 79% so I just gave it a top-up to 81%, which took five minutes. A 'how to charge' info board made the process pain-free.

The site was well signed from the access road but hard to miss anyway, being essentially a large car park with 32 rapid chargers in bright white. It was EV driver Keith Kelsey's first time there. "I saw the other chap helping you," he said. "We EV drivers stick together at times of crisis. Contactless doesn't always work."

We like Easy to find and to use
We don't like Missed out on the summer tariff

TESLA

Test location Brookfield Shopping Centre, Cheshunt, Hertfordshire
Charging speed 250kW **Cost** 55p/kWh

Located just off the busy A10 and only a few miles from the M25, this 16-charger station sits within a vast shopping centre complex at the back of a car park. In Tesla terms, it's pretty standard – discreet and no shelter but plenty of room to manoeuvre. It is an all-makes site (not all are), and with one tap of the card, my Kia was drawing around 85kW.

There were six cars present when I visited. Polat was charging his Kia Niro and told me the site could get busier and not just with people charging their cars. "Because it's a shopping centre, at peak times people just park in the charging bays if the car parks are full," he said. On the upside, he told me that with his £9.99 monthly Tesla subscription, he paid only 39p/kWh.

We like Great value, all makes **We don't like** Not obvious to see, non-EV parkers

OSPREY

Test location Halfway House restaurant, Brentwood, Essex
Charging speed 150kW **Cost** 82p/kWh

Just off the busy A127 London-Southend road, this charging station is indicated only by a small sign that is easy to miss. More obvious are the notices warning visitors of a £100 fine if they break the parking rules, which include logging your EV with reception within 15 minutes.

The charging station was spacious and attractive, with sturdy wooden canopies offering users decent shelter. An information board told us how to charge: "Choose charger, tap card, plug in." My EV9 drew power at around 79kW. There were six rapid chargers but only two other users, both charging vans. "It's a nice, quiet spot," one said. "I come here a lot and there have only been two occasions when the chargers were down." In the Halfway House itself, the toilets were clean, and a latte was £1 cheaper than in the Double Tree (see Ionity, overleaf).

We like Attractive canopies, easy to use **We don't like** The signage could be clearer

SHELL RECHARGE

Test location Southam, Warwickshire
Charging speed 150kW **Cost** 89p/kWh

At this charging station, not far from the M40 and located in the countryside, I was struck by just how right Keith had been at the Instavolt site (left). This would have been a lovely place to relax with a meal deal from the forecourt shop, except that two of the eight chargers I tried wouldn't recognise my cards. Was it me? I couldn't work out which buttons to press on the charger and in which order, so I was left wondering if the cards were actually okay. I tried resetting them again but the shop had just gone offline and couldn't do transactions. I settled for a toilet assessment (clean) and a general site survey (smart and tidy).

The next day I tried a different Shell Recharge, at Folly Hill, Farnham, Surrey. It couldn't have gone better. The 180kW charger (there were two) was much easier to use (plug, tap, charge) and had a clear 'Stop' button (not all chargers do). The tariff was 79p/kWh.

We like Location, facilities
We don't like Confusing to use

Shell
Recharge

FASTNED

Test location Redbridge Park and Ride, Oxford, Oxfordshire
Charging speed 300kW **Cost** 74p/kWh

As the UK's first park and ride, this place knows how to charge – and how to fine. A small sign beside each charger tells users to register their car for a free ticket. What it doesn't say is that you have 10 minutes to do so or face a £100 penalty. Eleven minutes in and I was still queuing at the pay machine…

It took the shine off an otherwise seamless charging experience – plug in, choose a connector on the screen, select payment method, tap and wait as your 300kW charger (one of 10) gets to work. Behind us was what looked like the UK's first public lavatory. However, the Fastned site itself was clean and tidy, with users protected by solar canopies. The driver of a Volkswagen ID 5 was happy. "I never queue and the chargers are quick," she said. She had just paid £54 for a charge but could have saved 30% by subscribing. "I can't be bothered," she said.

We like Powerful, easy-to-use chargers
We don't like Parking rules, grubby facilities

BP PULSE

Test location NEC Gigahub, Birmingham, West Midlands
Charging speed 300kW **Cost** 89p/kWh

This charging hub is well signed from the M42. That said, on the approach I nearly entered the long-stay car park next door, with its slow chargers. Once in the hub, notices warning drivers they would be fined for parking on the red routes reminded me that the threat of punishment is never far away.

At least the chargers (30 150kW and 150 7kW) were reasonably easy to use and backed up by instructions: press Start, choose charger and… then what? I decided to plug in and then tap. It worked but some chargers require you to tap first and then plug in. A fellow user was unfazed. "Chargers can be such a faff," he said, "but with these, the order you have to do things in seems logical." There was good weather protection, although, with it being close to going home time, most of the bays were taken. The nearby Starbucks was doing good business and the toilets were cleanish.

We like Accessibility, relatively easy to use
We don't like Likely to be very busy at peak times

pulse
EV09 FAB
EV CHARGING ONLY

GRIDSERVE

Test location Electric Forecourt, Braintree, Essex
Charging speed 300kW **Cost** 85p/kWh

No trouble finding this charging station thanks to a large totem pole on the roadside advertising 10p off a kWh with the Gridserve app. The forecourt is home to 36 charging bays sheltered by two huge solar canopies and each bay has enough room to park side on – handy whether your car's charge port is at the back or the front. There are also 12 unsheltered Tesla Superchargers to the side.

Plug and tap and the EV9 was soon drawing 85kW. The refundable pre-authorisation charge was £10 compared with an average of £40. Music was piped around the forecourt and in the main building, with its shops and bookable meeting rooms. "I've been coming here for four years and never had to queue," said one user. The following day, I called into Gridserve's M4 Reading services location. It was harder to find but the chargers (uncovered) dispensed up to 350kW and the EV9 was soon gulping 93kW for the same 85p/kWh.

We like Easy to use, good facilities
We don't like It would be helpful if the totem pole displayed tariffs

IONITY

Test location Double Tree Hilton, Dartford, Kent
Charging speed 400kW **Cost** 79p/kWh

There were no signs directing me to this charging station but there were plenty warning me of a £100 fine if I broke the parking rules. Reception assured me the first two parking hours were free and I didn't have to log the EV9's registration.

The charging area was clean and tidy, there was lots of room to manoeuvre my big Kia (there were only two other cars present on the 24-charger site) and the chargers and the contactless payment system worked smoothly. At 19% full, my EV9 was drawing 129kW and still doing so at 73%. "The location is very good and it's always very quiet," said one driver. "With a subscription, I pay just 49p/kWh." There was no shelter while I hooked up but, fortunately, the weather was kind. Inside the hotel, the toilets were spotless but, at £4.25, I skipped the latte in the bar.

We like Tidy and efficient **We don't like** Tricky to find, parking notices

COSTA COFFEE
GRIDSERV
SUSTAINABLE ENE

CARS
to 36 MONTHS WARRANTY AVAILABLE
AA RAC INSPECTIONS WELCOME
DRIVE ASSURED

APPLEGREEN

Test location Welcome Break, M40, Warwickshire
Charging speed 180kW **Cost** 79p/kWh

The traditional parking notice had a fresh twist here: "£100 fine if not charging in bay for longer than 10 minutes." I hoped the allowance included operating the charger, which was one of 16. Fortunately, it was a straight plug and tap. Drawing 133kW, the Kia's battery went from 79% to 92% in just nine minutes. But how to stop: tap my card? It wasn't recognised. Customer services said it happened occasionally, so just unplug. The session cost £12 – a reasonable sum for 10 minutes' parking, surely? The refundable pre-authorisation charge was only £1.

There were no canopies offering shelter but, as an alternative to waiting in the car, there was a Starbucks. Directions to the site were good off the motorway but soon became confusing. This was first-time EV driver Philip Major's second experience of charging. "Twice now, I've had to second guess which button to press to charge. The machines don't tell you!" he wailed.

We like Low refundable pre-authorisation charge, reasonably easy to use
We don't like Charging time restriction

5
electric
Download electric App
and save 5p per kWh

MFG

Test location Ilford, Greater London
Charging speed 150kW **Cost** 79p/kWh

The dreaded parking notices were present at this station but this time to deter non-EV drivers. Unlike the other sites I visited for this survey, it is by no means a major location but it is close to the busy A12 and M11. It is a classic MFG site, with just enough manoeuvring space, good weather protection and a well-stocked forecourt shop. There were four 150kW CCS chargers. However, I had to call MFG to understand how to operate a charger, which wasn't obvious (using buttons, you have to select your connector, tap, then press continue). Plugged in, my Kia drew power at around 75kWh.

Later the same day, I called in at a 300kW MFG station at a Morrisons in Fleet, Hampshire, with more space and where, at 60% full, the EV9 drew an impressive 150kW, still for 79p/kWh. This time I knew which buttons to press.

We like Unpretentious, good customer service **We don't like** Not easy to use at first

COSTA COFFEE

CONCLUSION

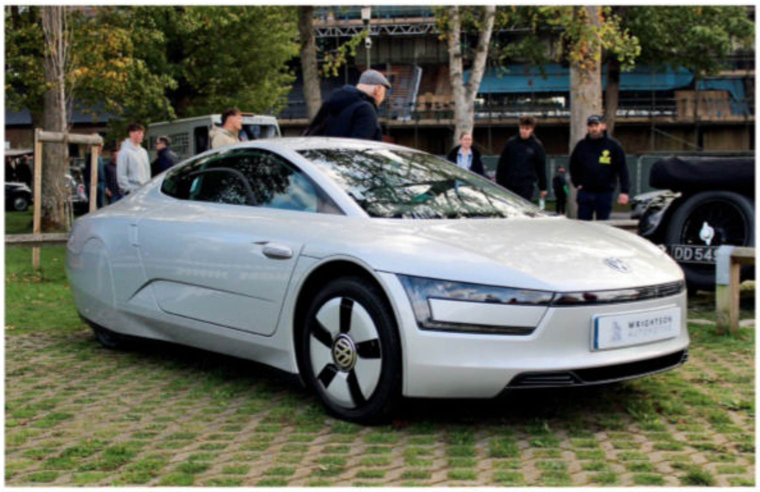
When it works, being able to pay contactlessly has made life easier for those EV drivers who have no allegiance to any of the charging firms and prefer to pay directly for their charge. Of course, by not paying via a subscription app, they are missing out on sizeable tariff reductions. Meanwhile, the new generation of rapid and ultra-rapid chargers are so fast that most drivers I saw were happy to wait in their cars rather than in the local cafe killing time with a £4.50 coffee. In any case, almost without exception, the charging stations were pleasant places with clean charging cables.

However, to that old complaint about range anxiety (still an issue in some parts of the country including North Yorkshire, as one Scarborough-based driver told us) must be added charger anxiety. Often during my two-day survey, I found myself worrying how easy the next charger would be to operate. A control interface common to all chargers would be a huge step forward. And then there are the parking notices. I appreciate that many sites are on third-party land and non-EV drivers must be deterred from parking in charging bays, but the signs are intimidating and create uncertainty for users simply wishing to charge their cars.

HEROICS CAFÉ
MERCH
AUCTIONS
PISTONHEADS
COFFEE ROASTERS

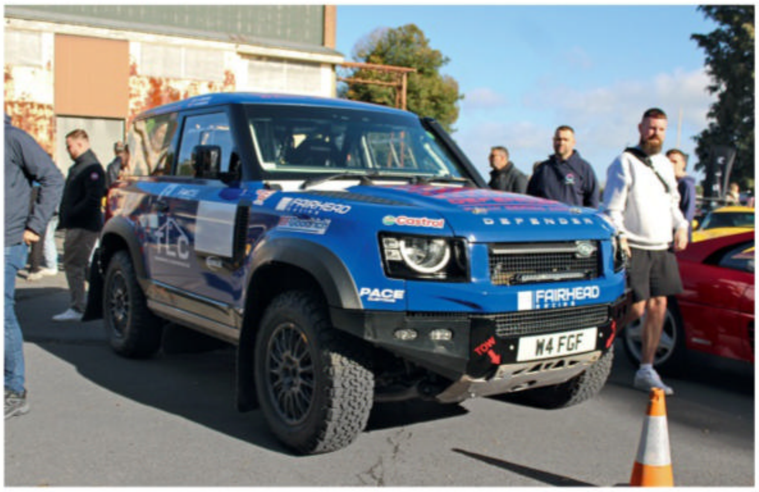
Aah! Bicester

The enduring Bicester Scramble brings out the very best in Britain's motoring scene. **SAM PHILLIPS** shares some of the highlights



VOLKSWAGEN XL1

Volkswagen's diesel-powered plug-in hybrid took a decade to develop and cost the firm £1 billion. Weighing just 795kg and fitted with a super-frugal 800cc engine and tiny electric motor, the XL1 could better 300mpg – but its badly timed launch was overshadowed by the Dieselgate scandal. This is one of just 24 UK cars and has covered only 3300 miles from new.

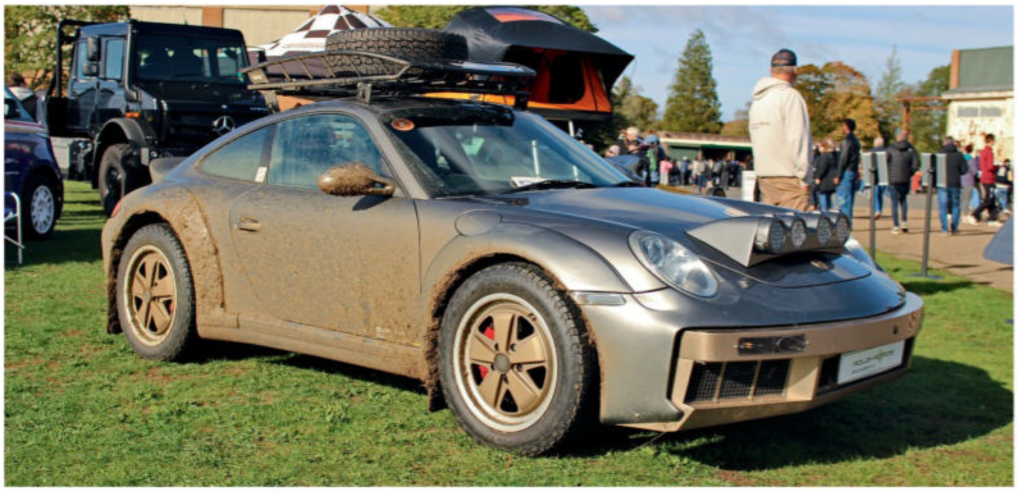


BOWLER DEFENDER CHALLENGE

Built for the one-make rally series, the Bowler Defender Challenge is a modified version of a Defender 90 P300. The rally-prepared off-roader retains the standard car's 296bhp four-cylinder engine but has a ride height increased by 25mm, is equipped with trick Fox-made dampers and features a stripped-out cabin with a full FIA-approved roll-cage.

ALPINA B3 GT TOURING

Tucked away in a quiet corner of the show was this beautiful Alpina B3 GT Touring, one of just a handful of examples sold in the UK. The B3 GT marked the end of Alpina's 3 Series-based models, with Burkard Bovensiepen's brand now under the control of BMW. We may never see such fine estate cars again – until the newly founded Bovensiepen business makes one, that is.



PORSCHE 911 ROUGH ROADS ENGINEERING

Off-road focused sports cars don't get much cooler than a 992-gen 911 Dakar – or do they? If you prefer 911s of yore but still want a dune-bashing off-roader, then this might take your fancy. This is a 997-generation 911 Carrera 4S that has been reconfigured into a 'sports activity vehicle' by Rough Roads Engineering, UK partner of South African firm Safari Projek. Its conversion kits for both 996 and 997 911 models turn the base car into a go-anywhere rally raid refugee by fitting new aluminium suspension components and a bespoke fully adjustable damper kit developed in conjunction with Rieger Suspension – the firm that makes the shock absorbers for WRC and Dakar Rally cars. The bodywork is also recrafted, with new front and rear bumpers, off-road wheels and tyres and, to finish it off, a centre-exit stainless steel exhaust. Respect to the team for leaving it caked in mud.

TOLMAN PEUGEOT 205 T16

Warwickshire-based restomod firm Tolman Engineering is best known for its expertise in recommissioning classic cars, and it has now branched out into the world of Group B homologation specials. It showcased its latest craftsmanship in the form of a Peugeot 205 T16, which has been expertly recrafted to make it more usable and more reliable. Parts for these rare specials are scarce, so Tolman had to make some from scratch, including a cambelt timing and pulley kit, front anti-roll bar bushes and CNC-formed coolant pipes. Tolman also tracked down parts for the transmission in France.

ALFA ROMEO 8C SPIDER

There are beautiful cars, and then there's the Alfa Romeo 8C Spider. The Italian marque's former design boss Wolfgang Egger, who penned the lines of the 156, ensured that the 8C retained its curvaceous styling when it went from a concept to a production model. Couple the 8C Spider's glorious looks with its sweet-sounding Ferrari/Maserati-derived 4.7-litre atmospheric V8 and you have one of the finest Italian sports cars ever produced.

TALBOT SUNBEAM LOTUS

The Talbot Sunbeam Lotus was built as a rally homologation special, and this classic rear-driven hot hatch set the World Rally Championship alight in 1981. Underneath it's similar to a Hillman Avenger but has a bigger, 2.2-litre Lotus twin-cam engine making 150bhp and a five-speed dog-leg manual 'box. It can hit 60mph from rest in 7.5sec and reach 123mph.

TVR T350

I have a soft spot for this T350. I followed it up the M40 to Bicester Heritage and was taken by its sonorous 350bhp inline six and its elegantly sculpted glassfibre body. Its purple hue immediately attracted the attention of those walking through the many displays, and it's surely one of the better-looking sports cars of the early 2000s.

BMW M3 GTS

This orange, bewinged super-saloon took the E92 M3 to new heights back in 2010. The 4.0-litre V8 was swapped for a larger, rip-roaring 4.4-litre engine that made 444bhp and 325lb ft, helping the GTS to 60mph from rest in just 4.4sec. Factor in the GTS's 75kg weight-saving over the standard model and you have one of the most dynamic M cars yet built. Find one if you can.

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"It's effortless to drive, live with and park"

FINAL REPORT **MILEAGE 4412**

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE

Our PHEV acquitted itself well while it was here – in all but one respect

WHY WE RAN IT To ascertain if this upmarket compact SUV can still hold its own in the face of fresher competition

As I write this, no Range Rover Evoques have emerged from the Halewood production line for more than four weeks, due to the cataclysmic cyber attack on its maker, JLR. I sincerely hope that will no longer be the case by the time you read this, but I wouldn't be surprised if, having now finished its tenure with us, our Evoque was whisked away into the hands of a customer, perhaps waiting for her or his delayed new car.

Having spent a good few months with the Evoque, it's clear to me why this model is in demand. In fact, even though it was launched in 2017 and sells in significantly smaller numbers now than it did then, its sales have remained fairly consistent for the past four years.

Naturally, there have been updates in that time and the two most obvious ones, I'd argue, have been the most successful in enabling the Evoque to keep up with its much newer competitors.

First, the brand's design language. The Evoque's smooth lines, echoed in the Range Rover flagship and Range Rover Sport, make it look very classy, and even though it's a clear evolution of the first generation, it feels miles apart in terms of refined design.

Blue was liked; bronze roof less so

Furthermore, I loved the blue paint colour from the off and received plenty of compliments, though many people were less convinced by the bronze roof, much like me. Still, it wasn't enough to cloud my overall appreciation.

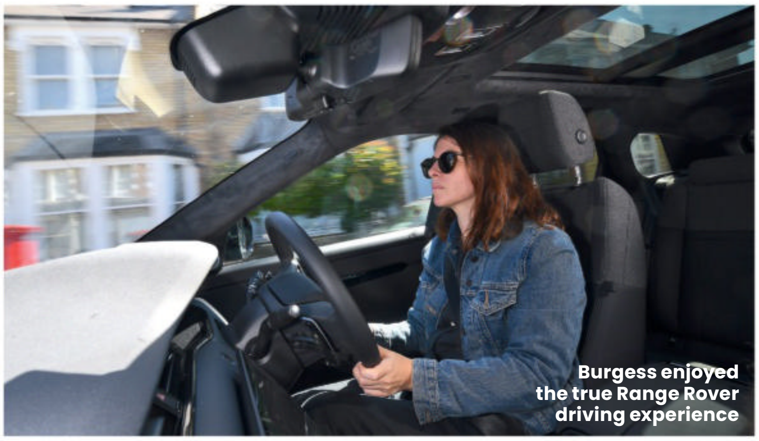
Second, the interior. The lovely big screen, the bezelled, minimalist centre console, the general sense of luxury. There are complaints, levelled at most manufacturers, about the lack of buttons – one reader wrote to me: "I so sympathise... It's a wonderful car, but where are all my buttons?" – but if you can put that aside, it feels sleek and mature in its execution.

SECOND OPINION

Rachel is absolutely right: the Evoque is ageing gracefully and still nails its brief – aside from the plug-in hybrid powertrain. There's a massive discrepancy between how nice the car is to drive when the battery is full and empty – and the battery isn't big enough to keep it topped up for long. **JA**

The interior has also been differentiated from those of the Evoque's obvious German rivals through its design, which is another of the model's charms. When most cars have similar functionality and often similar material finishes, it's tricky to achieve a point of singularity, but

It felt compact in town and was refined in EV mode



Burgess enjoyed the true Range Rover driving experience

Boot was usually plenty big enough but this was a handy fallback option

Its real-world electric-only range was a very modest 24 miles

happily the Evoque is able to do this.

I always enjoyed climbing into its driver's seat because of the luxury cosseting feel that it shares with the rest of the Range Rover line-up. The car always felt a great size to drive too, which I suppose is why compact SUVs are as popular as they are. The Evoque felt right-sized for driving and parking on the tight suburban streets of London but big enough to feel very comfortable for a small family and on longer journeys.

My son had plenty of space in the rear and made full use of the storage and cupholders in the centre console, while the boot always seemed accommodatingly spacious for weekly shops and weekends away.

My biggest gripe was the powertrain. There's far worse out there but I think, at a premium level of the market, it's reasonable to expect more refinement from a 1.5-litre turbocharged engine. That said, it's delightful in electric mode, and probably the majority of people opting for a plug-in hybrid Evoque will run with the battery topped up when they can. As I've mentioned previously, 29 miles of official electric range doesn't seem up to scratch these days, but I've every faith that the 2027 third-gen Evoque will address that complaint.

Other than the gruff sound when getting up to speed, the Evoque proved thoroughly enjoyable to drive. Its aforementioned size and manoeuvrability plus light and dependable steering meant I relished negotiating the tight streets near my house and going around the many roundabouts I encounter daily. But it was also an excellent, stable motorway companion and could even be lightly chucked around rural corners when desired.

All in all, then, this is a thoroughly commendable car. It's still very much luxury, but the Evoque's popularity means that it feels, when you're behind the wheel, under the radar, which is just how I like it. It's effortless to drive, live with and park. I'd have enjoyed it more if I had easy access to charging, but that's not the car's fault.

JLR will no doubt have plenty of Evoque orders to catch up with after its unplanned shutdown and I've every expectation the model will remain popular until news of a third generation is confirmed. JLR can definitely improve it but there is a very strong base on which to build, based on my time with the car. I was sorry to say goodbye.
RACHEL BURGESS

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TEST DATA

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE AUTOBIOGRAPHY PHEV

MILEAGE

At start 1552
At end 4412

PRICES

List price new £58,275
List price now £58,385
Price as tested £62,975

OPTIONS

Comfort pack £715, Tribeca Blue paint £705, Corinthia Bronze contrast roof £650, heated and cooled front seats £500, privacy glass £450, wi-fi enabled with data plan £440, Secure Tracker Pro £340, heated rear seats £300, configurable dynamics £235, front foglights £195, reduced-section steel spare wheel £170

ECONOMY AND RANGE

Claimed economy 185.8mpg
Claimed electric range 29 miles
Battery 15kWh
Fuel tank 56.5 litres
Test average 33.1mpg
Test best 37.5mpg
Test worst 29.2mpg
Real-world range 411 miles (petrol), 24 miles (electric)

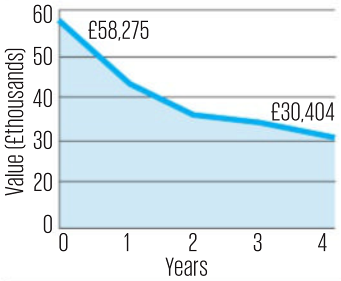
TECH HIGHLIGHTS

0-60mph 6.8sec
Top speed 118mph
Engine 3 cyls in line, 1498cc, turbo, petrol, plus electric motor
Max power 265bhp
Max torque 398lb ft
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Boot 472 litres
Wheels 20in, alloy
Tyres 235/50 R20
Kerb weight 2082kg

SERVICE AND RUNNING COSTS

Contract hire rate £662 pcm
CO_2 35g/km
Service costs None
Other costs None
Fuel costs £503.73 (plus £27.42 electric charging)
Running costs including fuel £535.15
Cost per mile 19 pence
Faults None

DEPRECIATION



PREVIOUS REPORTS

23 Jul, 30 Jul, 13 Aug, 20 Aug, 3 Sep, 10 Sep, 1 Oct, 8 Oct, 15 Oct

LOVE IT

PRACTICAL TYRES
Snazzy high-profile tyres were the perfect balance of being both a respectable size and admirably hard to kerb.

DREAM SCREEN
Infotainment system was handsome and largely intuitive to use, with excellent functionality...

LOATHE IT

TOUCHY SUBJECT
...yet changing the cabin temperature on the screen remained distracting and irritating during my tenure.

GRUFF PETROL MOTOR
A 1.5-litre turbocharged petrol engine in this day and age should be more refined, especially one from JLR.

HANDLE WITH CARE
The exterior door handles looked good but were mildly temperamental and felt like form over function.

POLESTAR 3

Just when you thought the UK had every conceivable festival covered…

MILEAGE 4225
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is this new luxury EV as compelling as its spec sheet and unique look suggest?

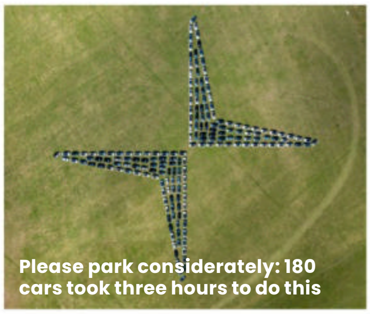
'World's largest Polestar logo' might not be quite up there with the 'Oasis to headline Knebworth' rumours, but for the inaugural Polestar Festival this was the star both figuratively and literally.

A total of 170 metres wide, this particular headliner was made up of no fewer than 180 cars lined up in formation and took three hours of careful positioning.

Almost 1000 Polestar owners and their families turned up to mark the fifth anniversary of Polestar's UK launch, yours truly among them.

Held at Bicester Motion, the festival had on-track and off-road passenger rides, live talks on all matters Polestar, displays from its suppliers and partners including the likes of Google and Bowers & Wilkins, lots of special editions on show, such as the brand's ice racers, and the UK debut of the 5, just days after being unveiled to the world at the Munich motor show.

I was keen to try the off-road course, not only to see what kind of off-road course could be cut into a flat Oxfordshire airfield but also to see how the 3 would cope with it, given that, despite falling into the category of an SUV (a broad term these days), it looks as far removed from an Ineos Grenadier as you could imagine.



Please park considerately: 180 cars took three hours to do this

Off-road (above) and on-track rides were on offer at the festival

Quelle surprise: the light slopes were no match for the 3. The hill descent control is the car's main off-road function and it did what it said on the tin, bringing you back down to ground level calmly and in control after briefly looking skywards on the way up the steepest slope.

I didn't much fancy a hot lap passenger ride so soon after lunch. That turned out to be a good decision, because watching the drivers slam the brakes on at the end of the longest straight revealed a quite extraordinary energy shift onto the front axle. I've often felt the car really lurch forward under braking on the approach to a roundabout and to see this from the outside confirmed just how big and heavy an EV the 3 is. You must treat its size and weight with respect, no matter how mighty the stopping power of its Brembo brakes.

LOVE IT

FRUNK
The perfect place to store a charging cable. Any electric car that lacks this facility needs better packaging.

LOATHE IT

LIGHT SHOW
The lights keep turning on when the car is parked in my drive. The cause is probably linked to that faulty proximity sensor.

The event was packed full of happy people with real enthusiasm for the brand. The UK is actually Polestar's largest market; we Brits have taken to the Swedish marque's Scandi-cool style and have welcomed its commitment to making cars that are as good to drive as they are to look at.

The people who make the cars are a good bunch too. Pete Allen, Polestar's UK head of research and development, proudly showed me the new 5, created at the firm's Horiba MIRA engineering base in the Midlands. I told him how Polestar was unique in having traceable (and agreeable) DNA running through its cars, to the point where you could take the badges off and still tell you were in a Polestar.

He said that's true of the 5, too, and it is not by accident. There is a real focus in R&D at Polestar on calibrating its models to have that traceable DNA, he said, and the company wants to be an EV brand that keen drivers seek out.

My trip to the taco truck aside, perhaps the highlight of the day was hearing that there might finally be a solution to all the problems I've been having accessing the 3 due to the dreadful digital key and its temperamental proximity function.

A recall is being rolled out for the 3 to replace a sensor that controls this function because a fault has been found. I've not been booked in for the work yet but will be soon.

As I've noted in almost every report to date, once you can get in the 3 and start moving, it can begin to show off its many other qualities, but while the first impression is so poor on so many occasions, it's a car that starts on the back foot. I am hoping the recall will change that.
MARK TISSHAW

TEST DATA

POLESTAR 3 LONG RANGE DUAL MOTOR PERFORMANCE PACK
Price new £81,500 **Price as tested** £90,800 **Faults** Malfunctioning locking system **Expenses** None **Range** 240 miles **Economy** 2.3mpkWh **Last seen** 8.10.25

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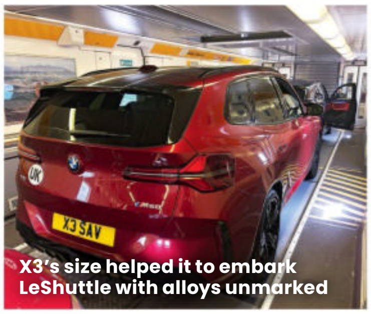
BMW X3

Prepare yourself for waffle: we're taking it to Belgium

MILEAGE 8248
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT Is this version good enough to be the performance X3?


X3's size helped it to embark LeShuttle with alloys unmarked

Cobbled streets in Belgium gave its ride a real test – and it passed

If you've ever visited Texas, you won't have missed a slight obsession with how big it, and everything in it, is. It's not entirely unwarranted: the state is three times larger than the UK.

You definitely notice it if you drive anywhere: my brother lives near Houston, and once on holiday we drove 17 hours to visit New Mexico, which shares a state border with Texas. It makes you realise how lucky we are that LeShuttle makes it easy to drive to multiple European countries relatively easily.

So when my 16-year-old niece and 11-year-old nephew visited from Texas recently, keen to travel, I hatched a plan to take them and my mum on a road trip that would tick off three European countries with a total mileage that wouldn't get you from Houston to Amarillo.

The BMW X3 M50 that Murray Scullion is running seemed the ideal choice. I didn't want anything too small, since my niece and nephew are used to holiday road trips in my sister-in-law's spacious Audi Q7 (which is actually modestly sized in Texan terms). But nor did I want anything massive, since I'd need to navigate the narrow roads of Brugges, Belgium, to reach our hotel. I still held my breath driving onto LeShuttle but negotiated it without clipping any of the alloys.

LOVE IT

ALL-ROUND CAMERA
It's clear and accurate, making it very useful when you're trying to navigate impossibly small Belgian car parks.

LOATHE IT

START-UP REVVING
Automatic revving on start-up reminds you of the engine's performance, but it's a bit antisocial in a confined car park.

The boot easily housed everything the four of us needed while the rear seats proved sufficiently spacious and offered enough charging ports to keep various mobile phones, iPads and Switch consoles powered up. And, it would turn out, ample cubbyholes to stash Belgian chocolate.

This wasn't exactly the sort of road trip where I was going to make full use of the X3 M50's 393bhp, but that power did make motorway driving in the UK and through France and Belgium effortless.

After effortless highway running and a detour to the seaside, traversing Brugges offered plenty of challenges that tested the BMW, not least the many cobbles. Despite the M50's stiffened suspension, the ride remained good and there were no complaints from the back seats.

I was certainly glad I wasn't driving anything bigger in our hotel's ultra-tight underground car park. The spiral ramp down was tight enough to give the sensors a field day, but it fitted. Just. The ventilated front seats prevented me from sweating too much.

Time in Brugges (waffles were eaten and boat rides were taken) was complemented by a few outings, including a trip into the Netherlands to tick off another country and spot some windmills. I'd hoped some country roads would give me a chance to push the X3's handling edges, except I'd forgotten that part of Europe is flat and features largely straight roads.

Still, we visited three countries with ease and my niece in particular was left amazed by the rich, deep history on offer in Brugges and the surrounding area – something Texas definitely doesn't have.

The return journey was similarly effortless and quick, and the X3 even surprised me with its fuel economy. The multi-country road trip was done on one tank of fuel. It was a good demonstration of why the X3 is such a hit for BMW: it's big enough for almost anything you would need to do with it, without its size creating compromises.
JAMES ATTWOOD

TEST DATA

BMW X3 M50
Price new £64,990 **Price as tested** £75,090 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 37.5mpg **Last seen** 15.10.25

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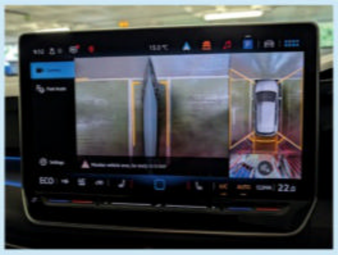
murray.scullion@haymarket.com

SNAPSHOTS

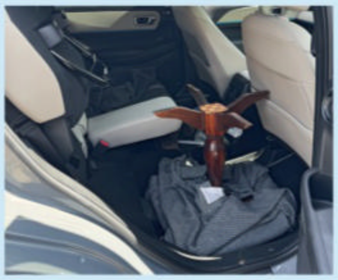


VW GOLF GTE

Mileage 4004 **Last seen** 8.10.25
The GTE has a lot of helpful features. The 360deg parking cameras are probably my favourite. They can be used in many ways, but I really like the side cameras, to see how close to the lines I am (as this photo shows). A few negatives: I've found the screen can be a bit laggy and the sensors' beeping is far too loud and can't seemingly be turned down. **WR**

SKODA ELROQ

Mileage 3841 **Last seen** 8.10.25
I've hurt my back – and it's pretty excruciating. I mention it because this is the first time I've ever actually felt like I needed my car to have a massage seat, so I was really pleased our Elroq has. But bad news: it's ineffective. All it does is slowly move the lumbar support in and out for a few minutes, doing nothing to alleviate my ache. I don't want my car to double as a physiotherapist, but come on, Skoda: if you're going to offer a function, make it worth it. **FP**



HONDA HR-V

Mileage 1298 **Last seen** 8.10.25
As I told the man at my local hand car wash in a horribly Alan Partridge-esque moment when he tried to charge me the going rate for a 4x4, the HR-V is actually a pretty small car. It shares a platform with the Jazz and it retains that car's 'Magic Seats', whereby the base folds upwards – perfect if you need to transport a small table. **JH**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A MERCEDES-BENZ C-CLASS

A CAR THAT'LL C YOU RIGHT

Used Mercedes compact exec saloon or estate makes a fine all-rounder

The Mercedes C-Class has always been up against stiff competition, not least the BMW 3 Series and Audi A4. But this generation – the 'W205', produced from 2014 to 2021 – is more than capable of holding its head high against its contemporaries, and you can now buy one from around £4000.

The W in that codename refers to the saloon but there is also the S205 estate, C205 coupé and A205 convertible. The two-door variants are quite different, so we'll leave them for another time.

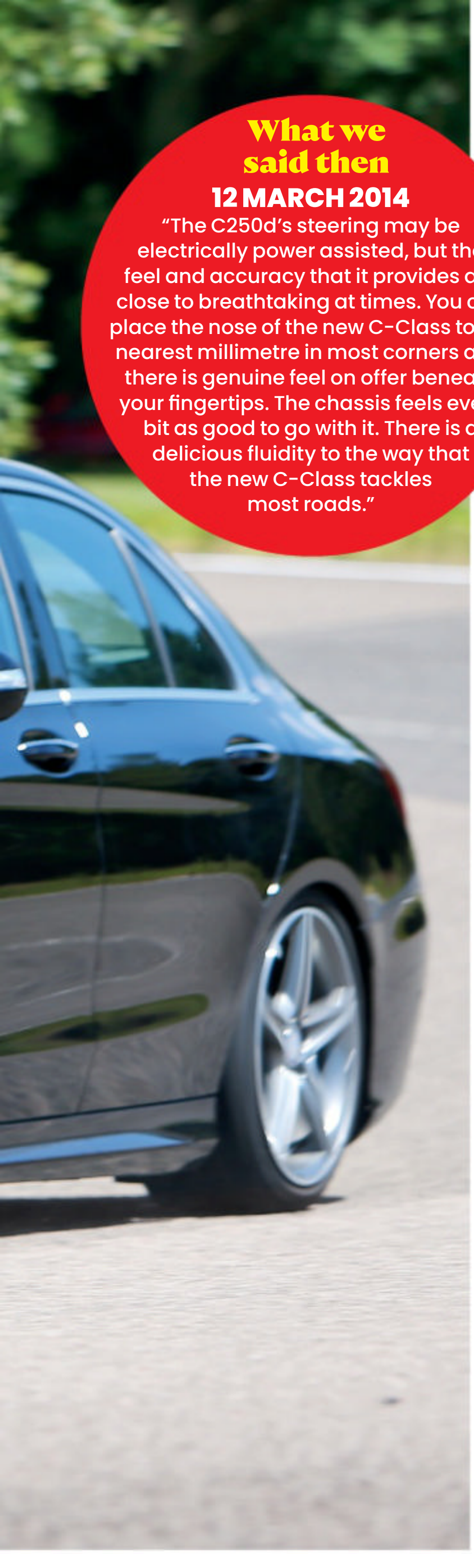
This C-Class was the first Merc to adopt the MRA platform, whose extensive use of aluminium helped make it 100kg lighter than the previous model, despite being almost 100mm longer. Mercedes claimed it was the most rigid in its class and we were certainly impressed by its dynamic ability.

We called the steering "breathtaking" and praised the car's plush rolling refinement. If that attribute is important to you, seek out smaller-wheeled, more softly sprung SE or Sport cars to enjoy the ride comfort at its best.

The W205 arrived during a golden era for mile-munching diesels so there are some amazingly abstemious oil-burners. Mercedes claimed 70mpg for the most frugal models, which is optimistic but not completely out of reach at a gentle motorway cruise. The cleanest versions officially emit just 99g/km of CO_2 and are all ULEZ-compliant.

It's not all sunshine and roses, though. The C200d uses a Renault-sourced 134bhp 1.6-litre that is unrefined and a bit slow. The

Rolling refinement is a strength; handling isn't shabby, either



What we said then

12 MARCH 2014

"The C250d's steering may be electrically power assisted, but the feel and accuracy that it provides are close to breathtaking at times. You can place the nose of the new C-Class to the nearest millimetre in most corners and there is genuine feel on offer beneath your fingertips. The chassis feels every bit as good to go with it. There is a delicious fluidity to the way that the new C-Class tackles most roads."

2.1-litre (168bhp C220d and 201bhp C250d) is livelier yet also very efficient, but it's still rattly and lacking in grunt compared with an equivalent 3 Series.

Before the C-Class received its facelift in 2018, the C300h diesel-hybrid was the most efficient and fastest of the bunch. Its batteries rob it of some boot space but it's a great all-rounder if you can live with that trade-off.

On the petrol front, the 158bhp 1.6-litre C180 is a little lethargic, the 181bhp 2.0-litre C200 pleasingly punchy and reasonably efficient, and the C350e plug-in hybrid short on electric range. Leaving aside the monstrous V8-engined C63, there is the semi-sporting, 362bhp V6-powered C43. It's very capable but offers little extra fun over a standard model so a BMW 340i makes a better driver's car.

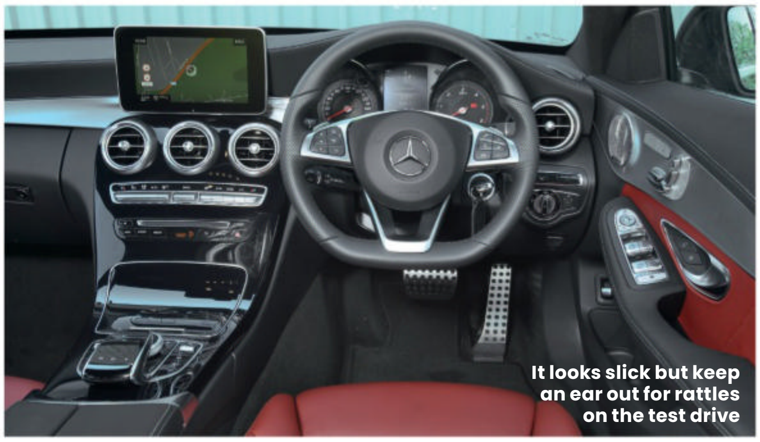
The interior is stylish and spacious. SE trim feels a bit basic but Sport and AMG Line are well equipped. The Premium pack ups the ante (panoramic roof, memory front seats) and the Premium Plus pack adds Burmester surround sound and a 360deg camera.

In 2018 the engine line-up was overhauled and a much larger and more modern infotainment system became standard. Power from the 1.6-litre diesel rose to 158bhp and the 2.1-litre was replaced by an all-new 2.0-litre in 191bhp (C220d) and 242bhp (C300d) forms. These 2.0-litre diesels are the pick of the range: they're refined, powerful and economical.

The 1.5-litre petrol with 154bhp (C180) or 184bhp (C200) feels strained. The 254bhp C300 is better, but a little thirsty. The C43 was lifted to 385bhp and the C300e replaced the C350e and took EV range from 19 miles to 34 miles, which the C300de (replacing the C300h) matched.

Choose your powertrain carefully and you're on to a winner here.

ALEX WOLSTENHOLME



It looks slick but keep an ear out for rattles on the test drive

> **"The 2.0-litre diesels are the pick of the range: they're refined, powerful and economical"**

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

IAN BLACKBURN

"I recently purchased an approved-used 2020 C220d AMG Line and I'm really enjoying it. It's nice to drive, really efficient – more than 60mpg – and still looks modern. I'm happy I chose a facelifted car as the bigger, 10.3in infotainment screen looks far more up to date. I avoided the newer generation due to its screen-heavy interior and inferior quality and so far I've had no regrets. My only issue is that the seats feel a bit overstuffed: not as comfy as a Merc should be."

BUYER BEWARE…

■ ENGINES

Some 1.6 and 2.0-litre petrol models have experienced premature thermostat failure, so keep an eye on the temperature gauge. Replacing it is a difficult job, so expect a large bill. Turbo failure on the 2.0-litre petrol can be a problem as well.

The 2.1-litre diesel is prone to simplex chain tensioner issues, while the plastic inlet manifold can crack and the plastic fuel filter housing can leak. The same issues appear to be cropping up for the 2.0-litre diesel that replaced it, so opt for one with an impeccable service history.

The DPF can get blocked after consecutive short or low-speed drives; a diesel with a very low mileage might not be healthy.

■ BODY

Lots of owners have reported rattling sunroofs and squeaking door seals. General cabin noises are also common – unlike in a BMW 3 Series or Audi A4.

■ ELECTRICS

The blindspot detection system is known to stop working so test it before you rely on it. The infotainment system can freeze, but not permanently.

■ INTERIOR

As well as listening out for rattles, inspect the interior trim closely because it has been known to show cracks. Also examine the Artico upholstery on the seats because they sometimes show signs of wear a little too easily.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

Facelifted cars still command a significant premium and with good reason. The tech, diesel engines and automatic gearbox (a nine-speeder replaced the seven-speeder) are all a step up.

A six-speed manual remained standard on lower-powered cars.

Four-wheel drive is rare but may be worth seeking out in combination with the estate. The wagon has 490 litres of boot space, 35 litres up on the saloon, and came as standard with 40/20/40-split folding seats. The estate sacrifices little in terms of dynamics and isn't much more expensive to buy.

Air suspension was available, but the standard ride is comfortable enough.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£4000-£8999

The C-Class is a familiar choice among minicabbers and cross-country reps, although high mileage shouldn't put you off if the history is good. Note that it's mostly lower-spec models here.

£9000-£11,999

This is where reasonable-mileage C220d cars come into play. Keep your eyes peeled and you might spot a C300h.

£12,000-£16,999

We're into decent facelift territory. You'll find some C43s here, too.

£17,000-£34,000

Low-mileage plug-in hybrids are available, and the 300de is an especially good option if you want a powertrain with flexibility. It's probably not worth spending double that on a late C43.

ONE WE FOUND

MERCEDES-BENZ C300D AMG LINE ESTATE, 2019, 50,000 MILES, £17,995

This forgotten sleeper's 370lb ft is ready to move the kids and the dog to 62mph in less than 6.0sec, all the while returning 50mpg. This particular wagon has a full-service history and an extended Mercedes warranty.

My car & I

'My friend thought it'd change my life'

"My wife once asked me: if you could have any car you want, what would it be? I said I didn't know but it would probably be green and slightly impractical and that's what I ended up with!" Steve Rooke still can't believe he's the owner of a green Maserati 3200 GT. After all, it's not like he set out to have one.

"I go cycling with a friend who owns a 4200 GT," he says. "One Sunday, as we set off for another ride, he said to me: 'I'm going to show you something that might change your life.' We stopped outside a car dealer, Hardy's of Hampton Court, and there was this green Maserati. I liked the look of it so back home I checked it would fit the garage and that I could insure it. And on the Monday morning, I bought it. I didn't even drive it! At the time, my other car was a Vauxhall Zafira so I thought whatever it was like, it would be better than that."

That was two years ago. The car, registered in 2001, had done 49,000 miles when Steve bought it but today it is showing only 2000 more. Does he regret buying it? "Not at all," he says. "Admittedly, the throttle control box needed sorting out and one of the turbos failed but it's a very special car. It's lovely to drive and is the first car I've owned

Our cars

This MR2 could be the best £3500 I've ever spent

BY JACK HARRISON

The two previous cars I've bought – a Fiat Coupé 20v and a Mk2 Mazda MX-5 – were, to put it politely, howling ruins.

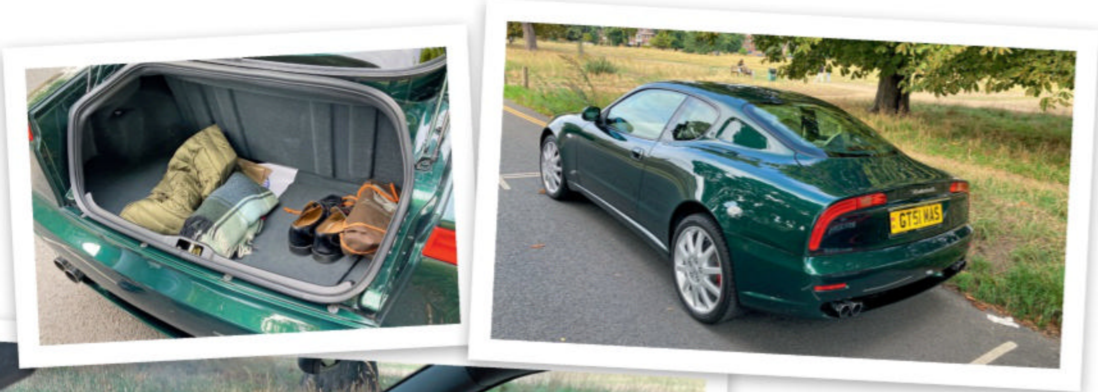
Both were at rock bottom of the value curve on account of being rotters, which meant I ended up paying far more on the upkeep of them than I'd have liked. I soon got frustrated with this extra expense and subsequently got rid. So when I caught my annual bout of car-buying fever, I decided I'd try to get something a bit nicer this time.

Another MX-5 was considered, but I wanted something different. I thought about a BMW Z3, an MGF or even an MG Midget. What I really wanted was a mid-engined four-cylinder machine with a sub-tonne kerb weight, a small footprint and a removable hard top. But I couldn't afford a Lotus Elise, so I bought this 2004 Toyota MR2 instead.

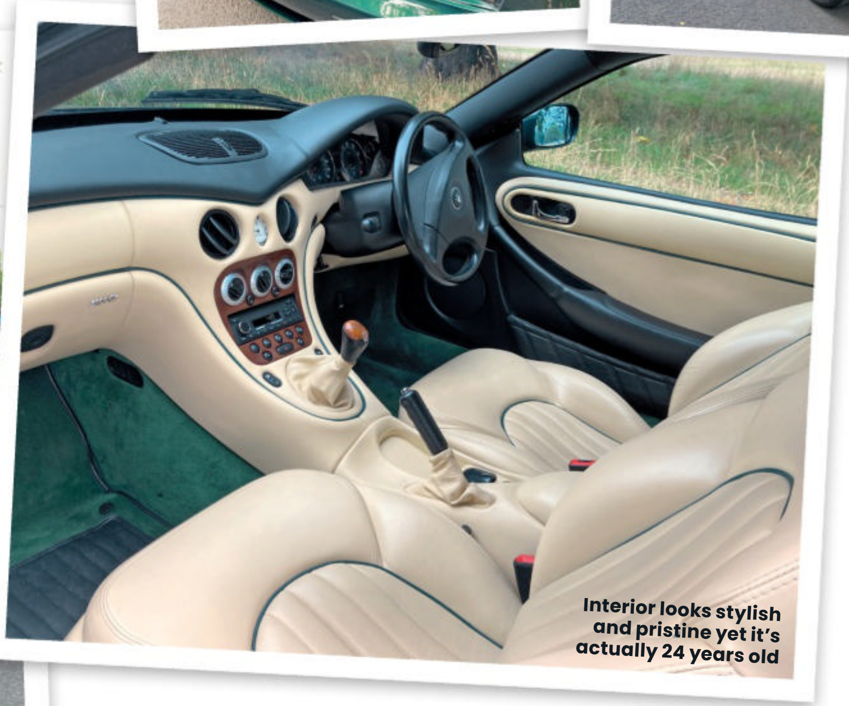
After weeks of trawling the classifieds, this one stood out the most: it was in my favourite factory colour, had fewer than 90,000 miles and looked tidy in pictures. And it was even better in real life. What's more, seeing how immaculate the seller's 'E34' BMW 5 Series was gave me a sense that it had been looked after.

I knew on the test drive that it was just what I was looking for and I've never been happier to part with £3500. It comes with the all-important hard top – ironically, something I've yet to take off – and some TTE rallying goodies in the shape of a roll bar and fruity exhaust. I think I'm in love from the off.

Jack's Toyota looks even better in the metal than in photos



Boomerang lights are distinctive; note spare shoes in boot



Interior looks stylish and pristine yet it's actually 24 years old

> **"It's the first car I've owned that I drive with the radio off: the V8 engine sounds that good"**

that I drive with the radio off: the V8 engine sounds that good. Put your foot down and it really goes. It looks stylish and is very comfortable. My one criticism is that the pedals are very close together. I have to change into lighter shoes to drive it."

Steve paid £18,500 for it. "On reflection, maybe the price was a bit high but I was happy," he says. "In time, you forget how it feels to part with the cash when you buy a nice car. I'm the fourth owner but fortunately the previous ones had looked after it properly, with some services even carried out by Maranello in Egham, near my home."

That previous owners cared for the car is evident from its immaculate interior, which, finished in magnolia hide with green piping for the seats and green carpets, is quite something.

The green of Steve's car is called Verde Mexico. It might not be everyone's first choice of colour for a wedding limo but Steve jumped at the chance to travel with his bride to the ceremony in his Maserati. "We'd been together for 27 years so we thought it was about time we made our relationship official. It was only a short journey to the registry office but I couldn't think of a better car to go in. I drove, of course."

Being a 3200 GT, Steve's car has the distinctive 'boomerang' tail-lights beloved of GT fanciers. Its successor, officially called the Coupé but also, because it looks like the earlier car, the 4200 GT, has more conventional lights. There was an automatic version of the 3200 GT but Steve's car is the rare six-speed manual. "It's a lovely gearbox – precise and mechanical-feeling," he says. Fortunately, with his lighter shoes on, there's less chance Steve will press the brake rather than the clutch.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

CHARLIE MARTIN

2003 BMW 745i

vs

DANNY DAVIES

2009 PORSCHE CAYENNE GTS 4.8

Brief: Find a design oddball for under £15,000 that split opinion when new but is now a cult classic

CM If you want to split opinions, buy a BMW. With my 7 Series, Chris Bangle set into motion a culture of design revolution – and of fobbing off those who disagree.

DD I agree with most of that. But surely you can't get any more controversial than the original Cayenne. It caused outrage when new but today it has suddenly seen a new wave of appreciation that I can absolutely get behind.

CM Very true, but I feel as though the Cayenne's cult following is rooted more in the ludicrous performance you can get for the money. It might be a bit too obvious. Pedestrian, even.

DD Fitting choice of words, given your 84k-mile 7er looks as though its life has been spent as a taxi ferrying pedestrians about. You can't say that of my immaculate Cayenne, which, as a GTS, means a 405bhp 4.8-litre V8 and the most attractive styling to ever grace the Mk1. Plus, it's only done 44k miles…

CM I can't deny the value offered by the £14,999 price of your Cayenne but my 7 – at just £3000 – pips it. I've plenty of cash left over for the issues of running a 20-year-old luxury car, whereas you've not even got enough remaining for a coffee to sip while you wait for your mechanic to present a huge bill.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

VAUXHALL MONARO VXR

2005, 96,000 miles, £14,500

This brawny coupé might not have the svelte looks of the Maserati (left) but its 6.0-litre V8 trumps the Italian for power, with 493bhp. This example looks in good condition too, with a full service history and an MOT until next June.

LEXUS LS 600H

2008, 63,000 miles, £12,495

You'll struggle to find a more opulent mile-munching luxo-barge for the same money as this LS 600h. Its hybrid V8 is smooth, the ride is pillowy soft and the build quality inside is first rate. The miles aren't crazy on this particular one and it's said to have a solid history.

MERCEDES-BENZ ML 350 AMG SPORT G-TRONIC

2013, 77,000 miles, £11,325

With a gutsy V6 diesel and upmarket, roomy cabin, the ML 350 is an ideal family SUV. This one-owner car is reasonably priced and you get plenty of useful features, such as sat-nav and a detachable towbar.

LOTUS ELISE S1

1997, 37,000 miles, £16,990

If Jack's MR2 (see left) isn't for you, perhaps this Lotus Elise will hit the spot. It has been lightly modified to enhance its handling dynamics further, has an upgraded exhaust and comes with a full service history.

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Steve Cropley
Matt Prior

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The Autocar Lost in the archive

Hudson cars were made in Chiswick from 1920s to 1950s

Ambassador was AMC's post-war UK success story

American Motors' six decades in Britain

You might have been surprised to read that such a quintessentially American car as Ash Medicks' Rambler Rogue was ever officially offered in the UK (p20) – but in fact its maker not only sold cars here over many decades but even produced some here too.

The story starts way back in 1911, when a London dealer introduced Brits to Hudson cars. Eleven years later, the Detroit manufacturer set up a UK arm to create a nationwide dealership network for its Hudson, Terraplane and Essex brands (that last name apparently chosen to lend an air of old-world sophistication).

Four years later, Hudson had a factory built in Chiswick, London – the first in a series of eye-catching industrial buildings that would form the famous 'Golden Mile'.

Autocar first tested a Hudson in 1930, when it introduced a 3.5-litre straight eight. We were taken by the engine's willingness to work in the top gear, smoothness and quietness, plus the comfortable ride, stable handling and high build quality, deeming the big saloon "an extremely good car" overall.

The post-war years were difficult for Hudson, so in 1953 it merged with fellow American manufacturer Nash, creating the industry's fourth-largest company. Both brands would survive under a new umbrella, the American Motors Corporation (AMC).

Our first AMC test car was the Hudson Rambler – a medium-sized saloon evolved from a Nash design and styled by Pinin Farina of Italy.

"It is an economical, efficient means of transport of pleasant appearance," we said. "It is not a car of great character, yet it builds up respect and even affection, especially as it is quite different from most American cars."

Through 1958, AMC at long last climbed out of the red, reporting a $26m profit after a 28% rise in sales.

"Frankly, AMC president George Romney has been both lucky and smart," we commented. "The new buying trend to more economy and utility [due to a US recession] has favoured the compact Ramblers, and they are selling like hotcakes. At the same time, [it's evident that] Romney has made great progress in shaving operating expenses."

'Essex Speedabout' meant something else 100 years ago

Ramblers were suitable for the UK yet still niche

Incredibly, these cars which had once been ridiculed now "forced Chrysler, Ford and General Motors to change their tune and produce their own ranges of small cars".

Little wonder AMC decided to discontinue the flagging Nash and Hudson lines and bet everything on Rambler as a brand in its own right.

Now there were not only compact six-pot Ramblers but also whacking great V8 ones, with UK imports and sales – all right-hand drive – handled at the site of the old Hudson factory in Chiswick.

Not that there were many to handle: around 200 a year from AMC's global exports total of just under 4500.

UK sales were split evenly between sixes and eights – rather surprisingly, given the 4.7-litre V8-powered Classic Convertible that we tested in 1966 averaged a dire 15mpg.

We did like this car, though, saying: "Owners wanting a roomy convertible for business and family use would do well to consider it. Its willingness and versatility quickly become apparent in everyday use."

Enthusiast appeal arrived shortly after, in the muscular shape of the AMC Javelin coupé, a 5.6-litre V8 response to the wild popularity of the newly invented Ford Mustang – even if it did "lack the precise handling and good brakes that we in Europe have come to expect".

AMC had become the public-facing brand name in 1970, as the company felt Rambler's image was too staid for this exciting new era.

Disaster also struck that year, though, when a fire tore through AMC's Chiswick site, destroying the main workshop and causing £200,000 worth of damage to stores, equipment, tools and 16 cars, five of them belonging to customers. It's surely no coincidence that in 1973 the UK concessionaire moved to a new facility in Swindon, Wiltshire.

Then an oil crisis hit. Demand for the best-selling Ambassador Estate slumped and volume fell well below expectations, while dealers blasted AMC UK's lack of advertising spend.

The final nail in the coffin was a "cool reception" for the Pacer, an odd-looking, wide-bodied 'small' hatchback with a thirsty straight six and a cheap-and-dirty conversion to right-hand drive. AMC abandoned the UK market mere months later.

It limped on until 1987; at its old Chiswick site now stands a B&Q.

KRIS CULMER

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Autocar's history of empirical road testing is the longest in the world. For more than a century, we have been verifying, scrutinising, describing and illustrating new cars in unparalleled detail. Driving impressions have always been a key part of this, around which the empirical tests have changed.

In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

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Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH					
500 Esseesse ★★★★☆ 25.3.09 Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo ★★★⯪☆ 9.8.23 A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione ★★★⯪☆ 26.2.14 Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO					
Giulia Quadrifoglio ★★★★⯪ 29.3.17 Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione ★★★⯪☆ 3.1.18 Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio ★★★⯪☆ 9.1.19 A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD ★★★★☆ 28.6.23 Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE					
A110 Première Edition ★★★★★ 16.5.18 Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT ★★★★⯪ 9.3.22 The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R ★★★⯪☆ 15.11.23 Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL					
Atom 4 ★★★★★ 9.10.19 Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN					
Vantage ★★★★⯪ 18.9.24 Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera ★★★★★ 21.11.18 Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish ★★★★⯪ 26.3.25 Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707 ★★★★☆ 30.11.22 A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI					
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.19 Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback ★★★⯪☆ 18.11.20 Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS3 Sportback Carbon Vorsprung ★★★★☆ 9.7.25 Uber-A3 refuses to be defined just by its truly special five-cylinder engine.	3.6	3.3	1619	34.1	-
S5 Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 15.1.25 Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 E-Hybrid Launch Edition Quattro ★★★☆☆ 1.10.25 Big executive saloon is spec-dependent – and misses its marks here.	5.8	5.2	2197	40.0	52
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition ★★★⯪☆ 16.4.25 Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT ★★★★☆ 5.2.25 Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 11.7.18 Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport ★★★⯪☆ 17.6.20 Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.6.19 A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro ★★★⯪☆ 2.6.21 A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport ★★★⯪☆ 9.11.16 Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic ★★★★☆ 20.3.19 More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport ★★★⯪☆ 7.7.21 Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line ★★★⯪☆ 14.5.25 Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1 ★★★⯪☆ 2.10.24 EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line ★★★★☆ 12.8.15 Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro ★★★★⯪ 26.10.16 A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line ★★★★☆ 26.9.18 Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus ★★★★☆ 30.12.15 Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT ★★★★☆ 2.4.25 Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY					
Bentayga W12 ★★★★⯪ 18.5.16 Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline ★★★★☆ 24.4.24 Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed ★★★★☆ 22.12.21 Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S ★★★★⯪ 19.4.23 Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition ★★★★☆ 16.4.25 Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner ★★★★⯪ 17.8.22 Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition ★★★★☆ 21.5.25 Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44
BMW					
120 M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 31.12.24 Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé ★★★☆☆ 8.4.20 Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé ★★★★☆ 1.6.22 A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual ★★★★⯪ 12.7.23 Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto ★★★★★ 15.5.19 BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.20 An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport ★★★★⯪ 1.7.20 Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive ★★★★☆ 6.1.21 A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition ★★★★⯪ 21.4.21 A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS ★★★★☆ 23.4.25 Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50 ★★★★☆ 19.1.22 Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL ★★★★☆ 16.11.22 A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5 ★★★⯪☆ 29.1.25 A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro ★★★⯪☆ 29.11.23 Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro ★★★★☆ 3.4.24 Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
750e xDrive M Sport ★★★★⯪ 15.10.25 Look beyond its divisive design for a highly accomplished limousine.	4.8	4.2	2472	35.6	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 15.2.23 It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive ★★★★☆ 16.1.19 A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible ★★★⯪☆ 5.2.20 Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition ★★★⯪☆ 3.6.20 Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport ★★★⯪☆ 25.1.23 A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 13.11.19 Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport ★★★★☆ 2.1.19 Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition ★★★☆☆ 20.3.24 Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive ★★★★☆ 29.3.23 Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive60 M Sport ★★★★⯪ 9.7.25 Took the luxury EV to new heights in 2022 and nobody has caught up yet. Still great.	4.2	3.3	2637	2.7	314
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack ★★★★☆ 21.8.24 Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-
BMW ALPINA					
B3 GT Touring ★★★★⯪ 15.1.25 Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé ★★★★☆ 22.9.21 Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-
BYD					
Dolphin Surf Boost ★★★★☆ 6.8.25 Efficient, well packaged and well priced. Its minor transgressions are forgivable.	12.0	13.0	1385	3.9	173
Atto 3 Design ★★★☆☆ 31.5.23 Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design ★★★⯪☆ 17.1.24 Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279
CATERHAM					
Seven 160 ★★★★☆ 20.11.13 Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S ★★★★⯪ 9.3.16 Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup ★★★★⯪ 31.8.22 Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-
CHEVROLET					
Corvette 3LT ★★★★☆ 22.6.22 Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ ★★★★☆ 16.8.23 Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-
CITROEN					
Ami Colour ★★⯪☆☆ 11.1.23 Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max ★★★⯪☆ 30.4.25 Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Hybrid 136 Max ★★★⯪☆ 22.10.25 Keenly priced and cleverly packaged – if you order with care.	9.3	8.6	1381	41.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto ★★★☆☆ 26.5.21 Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine ★★★⯪☆ 3.5.23 EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus ★★★⯪☆ 13.2.19 Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus ★★★★☆ 28.9.22 Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-
CUPRA					
Born 204PS 58kWh V3 ★★★⯪☆ 6.7.22 As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition ★★★★☆ 9.10.24 An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3 ★★★★☆ 8.9.21 Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2 ★★★★☆ 27.7.22 Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG ★★★⯪☆ 23.1.19 Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG ★★★★⯪ 3.2.21 Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 ★★★★☆ 18.6.25 Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1 ★★★☆☆ 5.2.25 Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246
DACIA					
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige ★★★★☆ 28.4.21 Compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort ★★★★⯪ 20.4.22 Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey ★★★★⯪ 27.11.24 Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey ★★★★☆ 11.6.25 Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-
DS					
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige ★★★☆☆ 10.7.19 No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+ ★★★⯪☆ 29.6.22 High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige ★★★⯪☆ 19.9.18 DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première ★★★⯪☆ 26.4.23 More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus ★★★⯪☆ 2.2.22 Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20
FERRARI					
296 GTB ★★★★★ 21.12.22 Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale ★★★★☆ 3.11.21 Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16
FIAT					
500 Twinair Lounge ★★★⯪☆ 24.11.10 Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

500e 42kWh Icon ★★★★☆ 26.1.22
More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.
8.1 7.7 1365 - 142

600e La Prima ★★★⯪☆ 27.3.24
Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.
8.8 7.7 1587 - 173

FORD

Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X
★★★★⯪ 20.2.19
Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.
8.9 7.8 1417 43.8 -

Focus ST ★★★★☆ 11.9.19
Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.
6.1 4.9 1433 40.7 -

Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium
★★★★⯪ 25.3.20
The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.
10.0 9.6 1260 50.0 -

Puma Gen-E Select ★★★★☆ 4.6.25
Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.
7.2 7.2 - 3.4 179

Puma ST ★★★★☆ 24.3.21
Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.
7.2 6.2 1301 41.5 -

Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD ★★★⯪☆ 23.10.24
Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.
5.8 4.8 2067 2.9 262

Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line ★★★⯪☆ 24.6.20
Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.
- - 1844 - -

Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD
★★★★☆ 23.6.21
Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.
6.8 5.6 2130 - -

Mustang Mach-E GT AWD
★★★☆☆ 27.4.22
Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.
4.2 3.5 2298 - -

Mustang Dark Horse
★★★⯪☆ 20.11.24
Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.
4.5 3.5 1853 26.1 -

Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium
★★★⯪☆ 10.7.24
Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.
10.8 10.6 1426 47.4 -

Tourneo Connect 1.5 Ecoboost PHEV Titanium ★★★⯪☆ 2.7.25
PHEV power is a smart choice in this versatile, though expensive, utility MPV.
9.7 9.5 1876 40.3 64

Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited ★★★★☆ 8.5.24
Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.
12.1 11.8 1971 38.8 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak
★★★★⯪ 14.6.23
Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.
9.8 9.9 2348 36.6 -

GENESIS

G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line ★★★⯪☆ 10.11.21
Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.
7.2 6.7 1751 60.4 -

Electrified G80 ★★★⯪☆ 12.10.22
Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.
4.4 4.0 2349 - 272

GV60 Sport Plus ★★★★☆ 24.8.22
Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.
3.8 3.1 2192 - 220

GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater
★★★⯪☆ 15.9.21
Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.
6.7 6.6 2217 45.0 -

GWM

Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition
★★⯪☆☆ 1.2.23
Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.
7.7 7.2 1580 - 154

HONDA

E Advance ★★★⯪☆ 26.8.20
More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.
7.9 - 1535 - 110

Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX ★★★⯪☆ 7.10.20
Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.
9.6 10.0 1248 57.0 -

Civic Type R ★★★★☆ 10.9.25
Road-legal touring car vibe perfected. Sensational – if a little serious.
5.4 4.5 1417 37.4 -

HR-V e:HEV Advance Style
★★★⯪☆ 24.11.21
Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.
9.2 9.3 1397 43.2 -

e:Ny1 Advance ★★★☆☆ 1.11.23
EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.
8.6 6.9 1756 - 211

HYUNDAI

i10 1.2 MPi Premium ★★★★☆ 15.4.20
Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.
12.3 12.9 999 52.5 -

Inster 49kWh Long Range 02
★★★⯪☆ 24.9.25
Dinky looks but a surprisingly grown-up and versatile ownership experience.
9.6 8.8 - 3.3 179

i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect
★★★⯪☆ 24.2.21
Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.
9.7 10.1 1065 63.5 -

i20 N ★★★★⯪ 25.8.21
N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.
6.1 5.4 1231 50.6 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate ★★★⯪☆ 7.6.23
Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.
7.2 6.2 2006 - 272

Kona 1.0 120PS Advance ★★★★☆ 6.9.23
Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.
10.4 10.3 1352 50.4 -

Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium
★★★★☆ 17.3.21
Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.
7.6 6.2 1612 47.7 -

Ioniq 5 N ★★★★★ 7.8.24
A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.
3.5 2.7 2221 - 224

Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium
★★★★☆ 16.10.24
A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.
7.9 7.5 2007 32.9 -

Nexo ★★★⯪☆ 12.6.19
Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.
9.6 9.7 1852 - -

INEOS

Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster
★★★⯪☆ 20.9.23
Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.
8.0 8.1 2682 20.9 -

JAECOO

7 SHS 2WD Luxury ★★⯪☆☆ 9.4.25
Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.
7.3 6.4 1814 35.0 41

JAGUAR

XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD
★★★⯪☆ 17.4.19
Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.
6.6 6.2 1727 36.8 -

E-Pace D180 AWD SE ★★★⯪☆ 11.4.18
Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.
9.9 10.5 1768 49.2 -

I-Pace EV400 S ★★★★⯪ 12.9.18
Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.
4.5 3.5 2236 - -

F-Pace SVR ★★★★⯪ 24.7.19
Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.
4.1 3.5 2070 29.4 -

F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE
★★★★⯪ 1.12.21
Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.
5.1 4.6 2264 - 24

F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé
★★★★☆ 29.4.20
The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.
- - 1743 - -

JEEP

Avenger Electric Summit
★★★⯪☆ 24.1.24
Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.
8.3 6.9 1601 - 172

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 3.10.18
Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.
11.0 11.5 1540 44.8 -

Compass 4xe S ★★★☆☆ 16.2.22
Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.
6.4 5.7 1872 46.9 22

Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited ★★★⯪☆ 28.10.15
Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.
10.8 11.2 1502 52.6 -

Renegade 4xe Trailhawk
★★★☆☆ 30.6.21
Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.
6.7 5.6 1816 39.4 21

Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland
★★★★☆ 10.4.19
Off-road icon is now more competent on it.
9.0 9.1 2122 37.6 -

KGM

Tivoli XLV ELX Auto ★★★☆☆ 14.9.16
Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.
12.0 12.6 1469 - -

Torres 1.5T K40 AWD ★★⯪☆☆ 4.6.25
Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.
11.3 12.0 1661 35.0 -

KIA

Picanto 1.0 MPI 2 ★★★⯪☆ 11.9.24
No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.
13.4 13.9 985 51.4 -

TOP 3

BEST CHEAP USED EVs

1 BMW i3

2 Tesla Model 3

3 Volkswagen e-Up

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1993 LEXUS GS 300

After outdoing the likes of the Mercedes S-Class with its first car, Toyota's luxury brand sets its sights on the BMW 5 Series – but is unable to replicate the ageing E34's shining dynamics. "Still, for the money you get a distinctive, comfortable saloon with build quality that ranks with the best in the class."

Price £31,950
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2997cc, petrol
Power 209bhp at 5800rpm
Torque 202lb ft at 4800rpm
Weight 1630kg
0-60mph 9.4sec
0-100mph 25.0sec
Top speed 139mph
Economy 21.0mpg

1958 ABARTH ZAGATO 750 GT

Italian tuner and coachbuilder collaborate to turn Fiat's tiny 600 into a sports coupé. "A gem which not only gives the driver an enormous amount of fun and pleasure but is extremely safe and comfortable and has performance that belies its size."

Price £1498
Engine 4 cyls in line, 747cc, petrol
Power 44bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 36lb ft at 3500rpm
Weight 711kg
0-60mph 15.8sec
0-80mph 33.8sec
Top speed 97mph
Economy 42.6mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

*For three weeks from publication date

			0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition ★★★⯪☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban ★★★⯪☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3 ★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line ★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S ★★★⯪☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S ★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT ★★★⯪☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2 ★★★⯪☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S ★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220
LAMBORGHINI							
Huracán Performante ★★★★⯪	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD ★★★★⯪	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto ★★★★⯪	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus ★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-
LAND ROVER							
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE ★★★★⯪	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE ★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury ★★★★⯪	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE ★★★⯪☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X ★★★★⯪	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1 ★★★★⯪	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE ★★★★⯪	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One ★★★⯪☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE ★★★★⯪	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography ★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44
LEXUS							
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design ★★★⯪☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack ★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport ★★★⯪☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi ★★★⯪☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition ★★★⯪☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi ★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-
LOTUS							
Emira V6 First Edition ★★★★⯪	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT ★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R ★★★⯪☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216
Evija ★★★★☆	30.7.25	Mind-blowingly fast and intense, with some defining digital inhibitions.	2.8	1.9	1906	2.2	122
MASERATI							
Grecale Trofeo ★★★⯪☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante S Granlusso ★★★⯪☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo ★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore ★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo ★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-
MAZDA							
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav ★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport ★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech ★★★⯪☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line ★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav ★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line ★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav ★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-
McLAREN							
720S ★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-
750S ★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura ★★★★⯪	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Artura Spider	★★★★⯪	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★⯪☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★⯪	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
CLE 53 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus	★★★★☆	20.8.25	Appealing GT leaves something on the table.	3.9	3.5	2012	26.9	-
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★⯪	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★⯪☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 43 Premium Coupé	★★★★☆	3.9.25	Less grunt with more grin for less outlay – but a rear-driven GT 55 would be better still.	4.5	3.7	-	36.6	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★⯪☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★⯪	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★⯪	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★⯪☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★⯪	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★⯪☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★⯪☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
G580 with EQ Technology	★★★⯪☆	17.9.25	Electric G-Class has no true raison d'être but is still strangely compelling.	4.5	3.9	3140	1.6	209
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★⯪☆	12.6.24	No bad vices but lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
S5 EV Long Range Trophy	★★★★☆	23.7.25	It outstrips expectations for the money, except on range.	6.0	5.1	1723	3.3	217
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★⯪☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★⯪☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Supersport	★★★★☆	6.8.25	Quite plainly the most polished Morgan to date yet still charismatic.	3.8	3.1	1180	44.2	-
Super 3	★★★★⯪	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★⯪☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai E-Power Tekna+	★★★★☆	8.10.25	Hybrid SUV takes big strides, not least on real-world efficiency.	7.6	6.1	1681	48.8	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★⯪☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★⯪☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	-	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST ELECTRIC SPORTS CARS

1 Alpine A290

2 Hyundai Ioniq 5 N

3 Porsche Taycan

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-2008 GT Line	★★★½☆	30.9.20	Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.	9.5	8.9	1638	-	-
e-3008 73kWh Allure	★★★½☆	4.8.24	Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.	8.5	7.1	2132	-	219
5008 Hybrid 136 GT	★★★☆☆	12.2.25	Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.	9.9	9.4	1736	44.0	-

POLESTAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 BST Edition 270	★★★½☆	12.4.23	A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.	4.5	3.4	2161	-	188
3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition	★★★★☆	12.2.25	Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.	4.6	3.8	2610	2.3	235
4 Long Range Single Motor	★★★☆☆	24.9.25	Electric crossover is desirable but something of a missed opportunity.	6.8	5.5	2246	2.5	310

PORSCHE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
718 Boxster	★★★★½	8.6.16	Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.	5.4	4.3	1395	35.9	-
718 Cayman S	★★★★½	10.8.16	Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.	4.8	3.9	1430	-	-
718 Cayman GT4 RS	★★★★★	14.9.22	A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.	3.9	3.0	1444	27.1	-
911 Carrera S	★★★★½	3.9.25	Supercar quick but gloriously rounded with it.	3.0	2.5	1600	34.5	-
911 Carrera T	★★★★☆	30.8.23	Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.	4.9	3.8	1456	39.1	-
911 Carrera GTS	★★★★½	5.3.25	Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.	2.8	2.6	1607	34.3	-
911 Turbo S	★★★★½	10.8.22	Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.	2.5	2.0	1640	36.3	-
911 GT3 PDK	★★★★½	11.8.21	Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.	3.4	2.7	1430	29.2	-
911 GT3 RS	★★★★½	22.11.23	Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.	3.2	2.5	1476	26.7	-
911 Dakar	★★★★☆	10.1.24	Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.	3.3	2.6	1660	36.0	-
911 S/T	★★★★★	3.7.24	Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.	3.7	2.6	1408	30.9	-
Macan Electric	★★★★☆	13.8.25	Well rounded in every sense and not without quietly executed driver appeal.	5.2	4.2	2262	3.0	219
Macan Turbo Electric	★★★½☆	19.2.25	Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.	3.0	2.5	-	2.1	219
Cayenne S	★★★★½	21.2.24	Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.	5.0	4.3	2256	28.8	-
Cayenne Turbo	★★★★☆	5.9.18	As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.	3.9	3.4	2307	31.5	-
Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid	★★★½☆	27.5.20	Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.	-	-	2490	-	-
Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé	★★★★☆	20.7.22	Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.	3.1	2.7	2251	26.1	-
Panamera 4 E-Hybrid	★★★★☆	22.1.25	Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.	3.8	2.4	2370	30.1	29
Taycan Turbo S	★★★★½	30.10.24	Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.	2.6	1.9	2356	2.7	233

TOP 3

BEST 4x4s

1 Land Rover Defender Octa

2 Jeep Wrangler

3 Toyota Land Cruiser

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

RENAULT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Clio TCe 100 Iconic	★★★★½	27.11.19	Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.	11.6	10.9	1138	56.9	-
4 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic	★★★★☆	16.7.25	Charismatic but grown-up, the reborn 4 is a real contender.	8.2	7.5	1493	3.3	182
5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five	★★★★½	12.3.25	Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.	7.7	7.2	1461	3.1	166
Megane E-Tech Techno	★★★½☆	23.11.22	Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.	6.9	5.4	1688	-	198
Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC	★★★½☆	18.3.20	Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.	9.4	9.2	1363	53.1	-
Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition	★★★½☆	13.10.21	Eminently sensible but unspectacular.	11.0	10.1	1365	58.3	-
Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range	★★★★☆	26.6.24	The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.	8.1	6.3	1916	-	313
Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine	★★★½☆	19.7.23	Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.	8.5	6.9	1696	43.5	-

ROLLS-ROYCE

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghost Series II Black Badge	★★★★½	25.6.25	Only flirts with sporting appeal, and gives up no Rolls accomplishments in doing so.	4.5	3.6	2576	25.8	-
Phantom	★★★★★	4.4.18	The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.	5.5	4.4	2780	28.4	-
Spectre	★★★★½	20.12.23	Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.	4.1	3.1	2935	-	245
Cullinan Black Badge	★★★★☆	19.2.20	Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.	4.9	4.2	2739	23.6	-

SEAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★½	19.7.17	Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.	10.0	10.0	1047	55.6	-
Leon eHybrid FR	★★★½☆	2.12.20	Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.	7.2	6.2	1558	46.3	26
Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology	★★★★☆	15.11.17	Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.	10.5	10.7	1149	40.9	-
Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG	★★★☆☆	25.10.23	Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.	8.9	8.0	1396	44.4	-

SKODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort	★★★★½	9.2.22	Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.	9.9	9.7	1117	58.7	-
Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG	★★★½☆	31.7.19	Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.	7.9	7.3	1200	52.9	-
Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG	★★★★☆	2.9.20	Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.	8.4	8.7	1510	73.0	-
Octavia Estate vRS	★★★★☆	29.1.25	A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.	5.9	4.8	-	37.6	-
Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate	★★★★★	17.7.24	The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.	8.4	8.2	1673	68.7	-
Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout	★★★½☆	30.1.19	Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.	8.9	9.6	1629	47.1	-
Elroq 85 Edition	★★★★½	19.3.25	Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.	6.1	5.0	2085	3.5	246
Enyaq iV 80 Lounge	★★★★☆	18.8.21	Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.	8.3	7.8	2098	-	262

SMART

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
#1 Premium	★★★½☆	8.11.23	Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.	5.6	4.6	1861	-	229
#3 Premium	★★★½☆	15.5.24	Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.	5.7	4.9	1832	-	205

SUBARU

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring	★★★½☆	28.2.24	Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.	10.4	10.4	1620	45.3	-
Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring	★★★½☆	27.9.23	A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.	9.3	8.7	1690	42.8	-
Solterra AWD Touring	★★★☆☆	15.3.23	A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.	6.7	6.2	2051	-	169

SUZUKI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT	★★★★½	7.4.21	Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.	6.4	5.8	1966	44.4	48

TESLA

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Standard Range Plus	★★★★☆	4.9.19	Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.	5.8	4.7	1633	-	156
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range Rear-Wheel Drive	★★★★☆	27.8.25	Evolution keeps Model Y nicely on the boil – for now.	5.7	4.3	1903	3.2	315
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland Hybrid GS	★★★½☆	27.8.25	Spacious, functional, efficient and good value, yet neither grand nor lovely.	9.8	9.3	1623	52.2	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
ID 7 GTX Tourer	★★★☆☆	13.8.25	Sporty electric estate is appealing but not the product the GTX brand needs.	5.3	4.6	2353	2.9	241
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 T8 Ultra	★★★½☆	15.10.25	Volvo's crowd pleaser is still classy and spacious, though far from cutting edge.	4.6	4.1	2145	34.3	40
XC90 B5 AWD Ultra Bright	★★★½☆	2.7.25	Still a mature, versatile and wilfully unspectacular choice.	8.0	7.5	2117	37.0	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

				0–60mph	30–70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Nissan Ariya Early 2026
Leaf-flavoured makeover for Nissan's Volkswagen ID 4 rival comes with V2L functionality.

Bentley Continental Supersports Late 2026
Luxo-coupé goes extreme with a 450kg weight loss and a pure V8 pumping out 640bhp.

Audi 'A2' E-tron Early 2027
EV replacement for Q2 and A1, based on Skoda Elroq, brings A2 styling – and maybe its name.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
FUEL GAUGE ARROWS

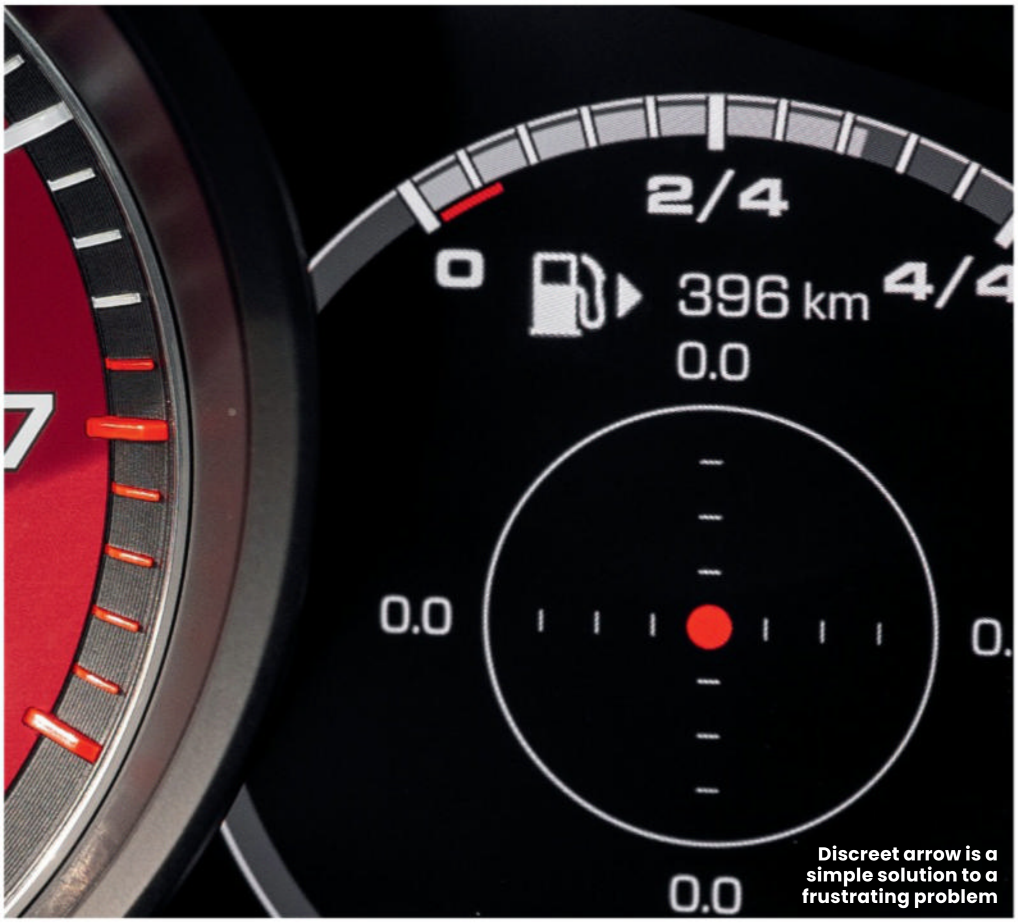
BY JAMES ATTWOOD

The history of the motor car is one of continuous innovation, with incredibly clever people relentlessly inventing new technologies to make cars safer, perhaps faster and generally better. We're talking inventions such as seatbelts, fuel injection, anti-lock brakes, airbags and power steering – and the little arrow on your fuel gauge that tells you which side of the car the filler is on.

Okay, that last innovation isn't quite like the others. It didn't require countless hours of research, development, engineering and testing: it's just a sticker. But that simple innovation, dreamed up by Ford designer Jim Moylan in the 1980s, has surely made life immeasurably easier for countless motorists.

Moylan was filling up a company car on a rainy day and initially pulled up on the forecourt with the pump on the wrong side for the fuel cap. Suitably annoyed, he came up with a solution. He suggested it to his bosses, and in 1989 the arrow was introduced on the Ford Escort and Mercury Tracer. These days, you'll struggle to find a fuel gauge that doesn't have one.

Because it's one of those 'hidden in plain sight' innovations, there's also a pleasing element of 'if you know, you know' and genuine delight when you watch someone learn about it for the first time. Soon after my niece passed her driving test, for my first outing as a passenger we went to fill up her car. As we approached the fuel station she mentioned she didn't know which side the filler was on, and being able to let her in on the not-quite-a-secret was a moment of pure joy.



Discreet arrow is a simple solution to a frustrating problem

Filler cap locator is designed to prevent this sort of thing

"Very few EVs tell you which side the charging port is on"

The brilliance of the now ubiquitous fuel gauge arrow is its simplicity. Cars are incredibly – and increasingly – complex things, and much of the technology that underpins them is staggeringly advanced. But the best solution to a problem will always be the simplest one. And here's a problem solved with a remarkably simple – and cheap – bit of lateral thinking.

But I worry we may be going backwards. Because while almost every fuel gauge now has an arrow, I've noticed very few EVs feature one to tell you which side the charging port is on. Which seems remiss, given how much variance there is in the location of them.

At a time when charging an EV is still a frustration for many, anything that can make it as simple as possible should be welcomed. So a plea to all car makers: when working on your lovely new digital driver displays for your fancy EVs, please spare just a few pixels for an arrow pointing to the side that's home to the charging port. It won't cost anything, but it will make life just a little bit easier for your customers.

What we did this week

PAR FOR THE COURSE

I went for lunch with Lamborghini's charismatic CEO Stephan Winkelmann, who was in town for the opening of the brand's new Mayfair showroom. He regaled us with strategy plans, his next pit stops (China, then Japan) and the assurance that he doesn't typically eat four-course lunches, as we did that day. It sure beat my usual Tesco lunch deal.

RACHEL BURGESS

MIRACLE CURE

I recently visited an unfamiliar hospital and was stunned to discover that parking was entirely free. Yes, free! The absence of million-word T&C signs, ANPR cameras, a baffling app and the threat of an intimidating 'invoice' letter made me feel much better before my ailment had even been seen to. The NHS makes life better for all; parking companies… do not. God bless you, Lewes Victoria.

KRIS CULMER

AXLE POSE

It's not the aftermath of a failed automatic emergency braking ADAS test, it's just me working out whether the new Dacia Bigster Hybrid 4x4 has a multi-link or a torsion beam rear axle. Turns out it's a torsion beam, surprisingly enough.

ILLYA VERPRAET

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THE LIGHT FANTASTIC
NEW PORSCHE 928S4 TESTED
WHAT REALLY MATTERED IN 2018
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BMW's shock supercar
The Autocar
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For the daring few. The new CUPRA Tavascan is here to redefine performance with its bold, unconventional design and state-of-the-art technology. Our first all-electric SUV coupé, crafted for those who defy the ordinary.

Maximum range on a full charge for a CUPRA Tavascan is 298.3 - 342.9 miles (official test WLTP figures) depending on the trim. Official fuel consumption for the Tavascan mpg (litres/100km) combined: N/A. Combined CO_2 emissions: 0g/km. Test data obtained under standardised conditions after the battery had been fully charged (to 100%). The Tavascan is a battery electric vehicle requiring mains electricity for charging. Figures shown are for comparability purposes and may vary by trim. Only compare fuel consumption, CO_2 and electric range figures with other vehicles tested to the same technical procedures. These figures may not reflect real life driving results, which will depend upon a number of factors including the starting charge of the battery, accessories fitted (post-registration), variations in weather, driving styles, route conditions, speed, vehicle and battery age and vehicle load. Zero emissions while driving. Data correct at September 2025.